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Best Games of 2003

Star Wars Galaxies? Doom III? Unreal II?
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By PETER CROSBY

Recent military aggressions around the globe have many nations worried. Between the United States, China and the Global Liberation Army, tensions run high. Their leaders profess no interest in escalating the situation, but words ring hollow when satellite photos tell a different story. The issue is no longer "*Will* there be military conflict?" but instead, "Who will *prevail*?"



CHINA:

No longer just a red-communist step-child, China's modern army is well-financed with a strong nationalistic bent. Parading technology like Dragon Tanks and Nuclear Missiles, China's military goes beyond large troop numbers. But defeating the agile GLA is still no walk in Yangmingshan National Park. *So while their new military is formidable, so is the task ahead.*



TEEN T Violence CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
PC CD ROM
The way it's meant to be played NVIDIA

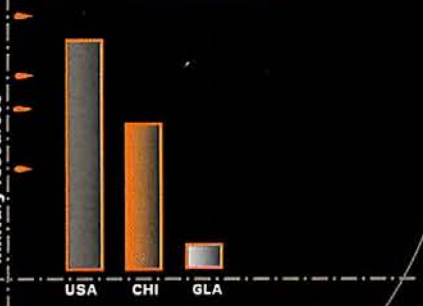
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UNITED STATES:

Roused by GLA bio-terrorism attacks, the U.S. must now act decisively. America's military leader faces the unenviable task of rooting out an elusive foe. The world's most advanced military — armed with Daisy-Cutter bombs and Comanche Gunships — will make the job easier. But eradicating the cell-based GLA will also take courage, conviction and the will to see a prolonged campaign through to the end.







THE WILD CARD:

Despite inferior military resources, the GLA still poses a very credible threat to worldwide security.



GLOBAL LIBERATION ARMY:

Facing superior firepower, the GLA embraces bio-terrorism, sabotage and suicide bombings to further its political agenda. But leading a chaotic group of "freedom" fighters against two global super-powers will take some doing.

S" AND "TOMAHAWK MISSILES."





COMMAND & CONQUER
GENERALS
February 11th, 2003

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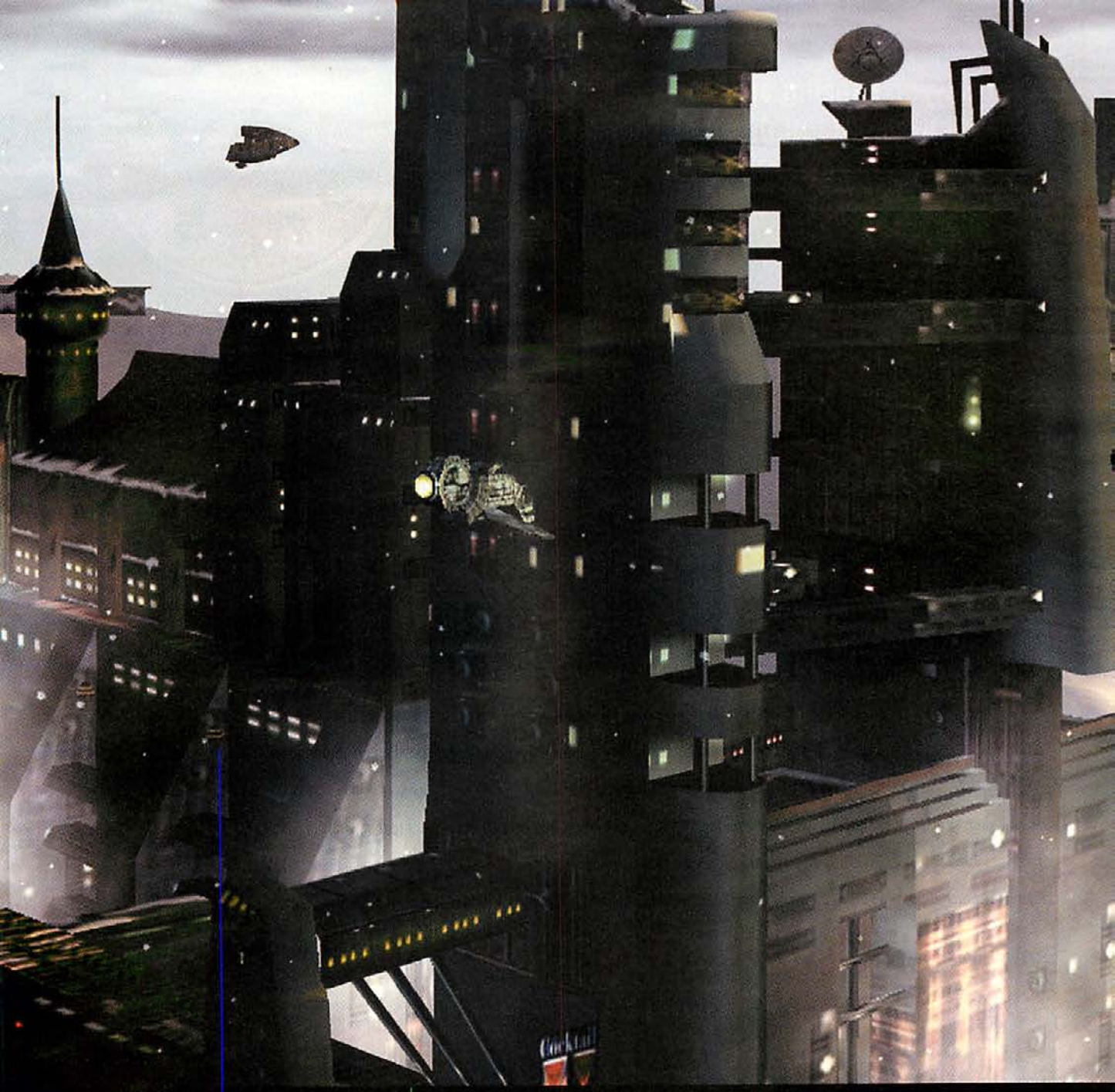
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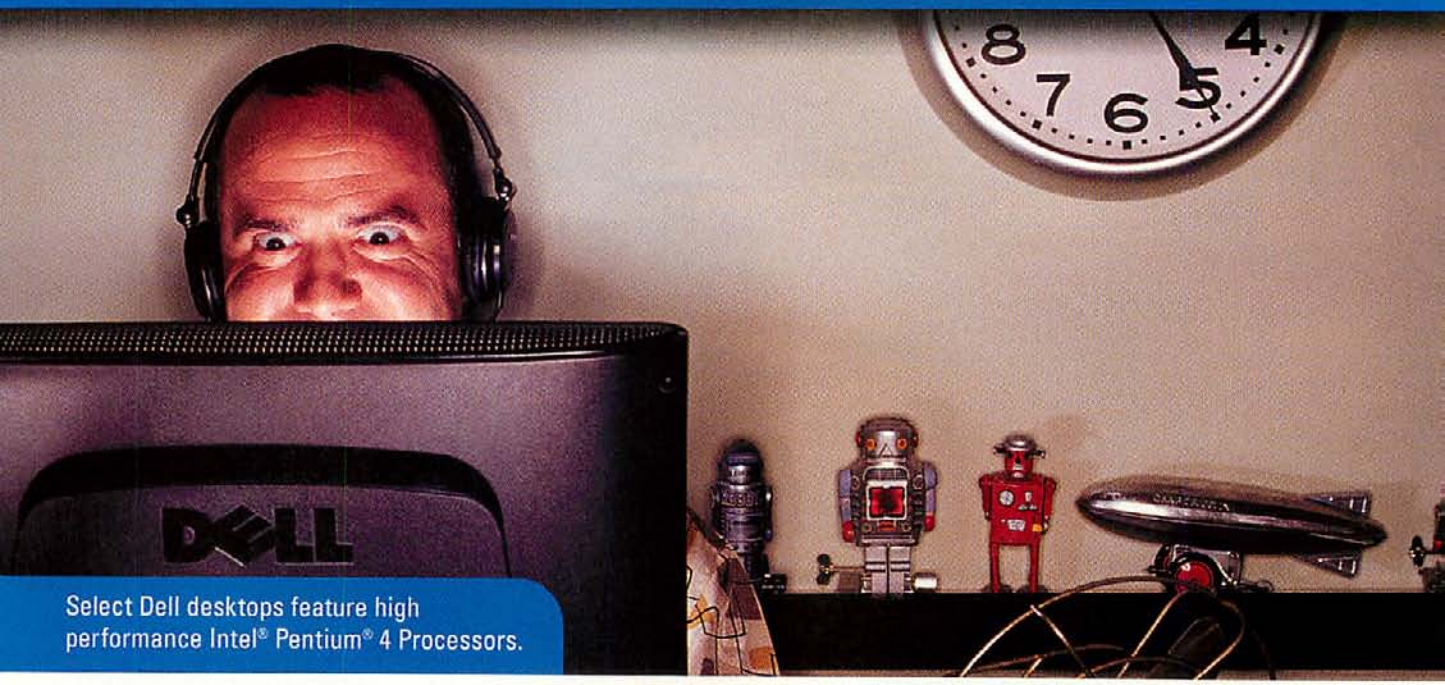
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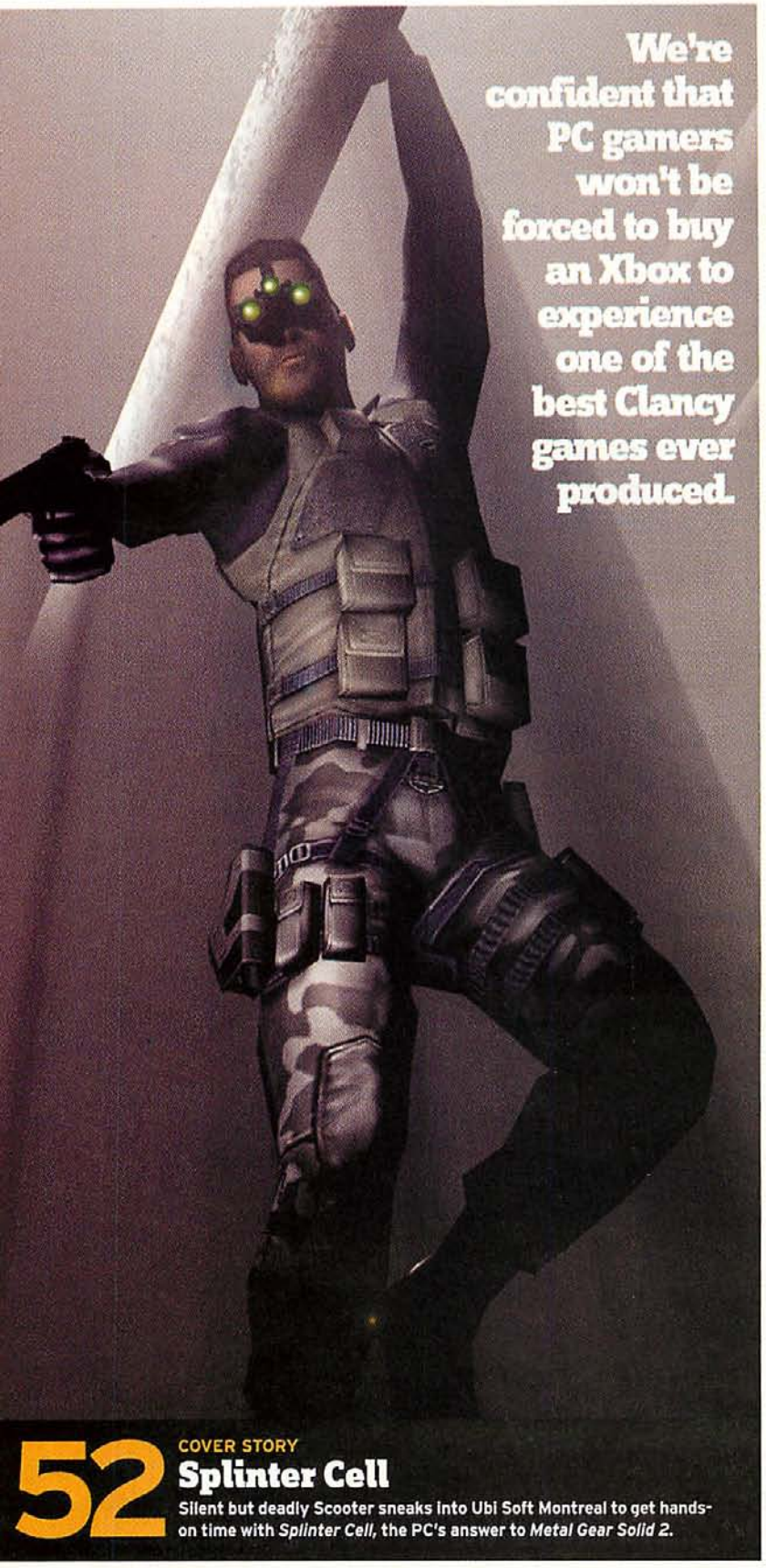
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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD February 2003 Issue #223



52 COVER STORY
Splinter Cell
Silent but deadly Scooter sneaks into Ubi Soft Montreal to get hands-on time with *Splinter Cell*, the PC's answer to *Metal Gear Solid 2*.

14 **Editorial**
Jeff rambles again. Just keep smiling and nodding, and maybe he'll go away.

18 **Letters**
Fear the wrath of the angry Druids! Plus: one woman's lament for Greenspeak, and the first (and hopefully last) ever Belgian Corner.

26 **Loading...**
It's sequel month in the Loading section, and we've got some good stuff in store. (Does that make this Loadin' 2: Electric Boogaloo?) Check out **EverQuest II** in all its glory and some of the sick weaponry in action from **Unreal II: The Awakening.**

32 **Read Me**
What will be the best games of 2003? Find out on page 32. Also, see our exclusive update on **Counter-Strike: Condition Zero,** and get the latest on Nvidia's highly touted GeForce FX. Plus Pipeline, a readers' choice Top 20, and Jeff Green prancing around in a pink tutu. Maybe we better skip that last part...

Columns
40 Homebrew



60 **Handhelds Got Game**
Do a whole lot more with your Palm. Easy there, slick, we're talking about the digital handhelds that stash phone numbers. They've been evolving and are finally ready to play. In fact, we found some portable games that are better than some PC titles.

100 **Tech**
Reviewed: Velocity Micro's latest laptop, Via's P4 motherboard, Creative Lab's Audigy 2 soundcard and 6.1 speaker setup, Logitech's newest MOMO wheel, and a Saitek joystick. Also, how to create a dual boot system, Tech Medics, Killer Rigs, and Loyd Case's new column.

113 **Gamer's Edge**
Hone your running and gunning skills with our comprehensive strategies for **Battlefield 1942.** Plus, check out some of the best maps for **Unreal Tournament 2003** and master the Night Elves in our final installment of the Encyclopedia WarCraftica.

128 **Scorched Earth**
One man's solution for floppies and software.



48 UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING
Napalm flamethrowers, grenade launchers, spider guns–can you say "Yippee!"?



74 HOT PURSUIT 2



90 NHL 2003



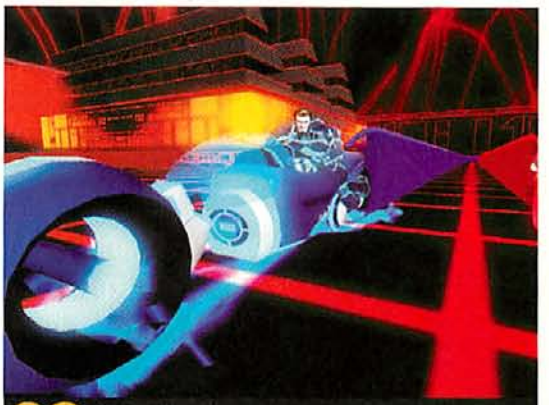
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50 Rainbow Six: Raven Shield

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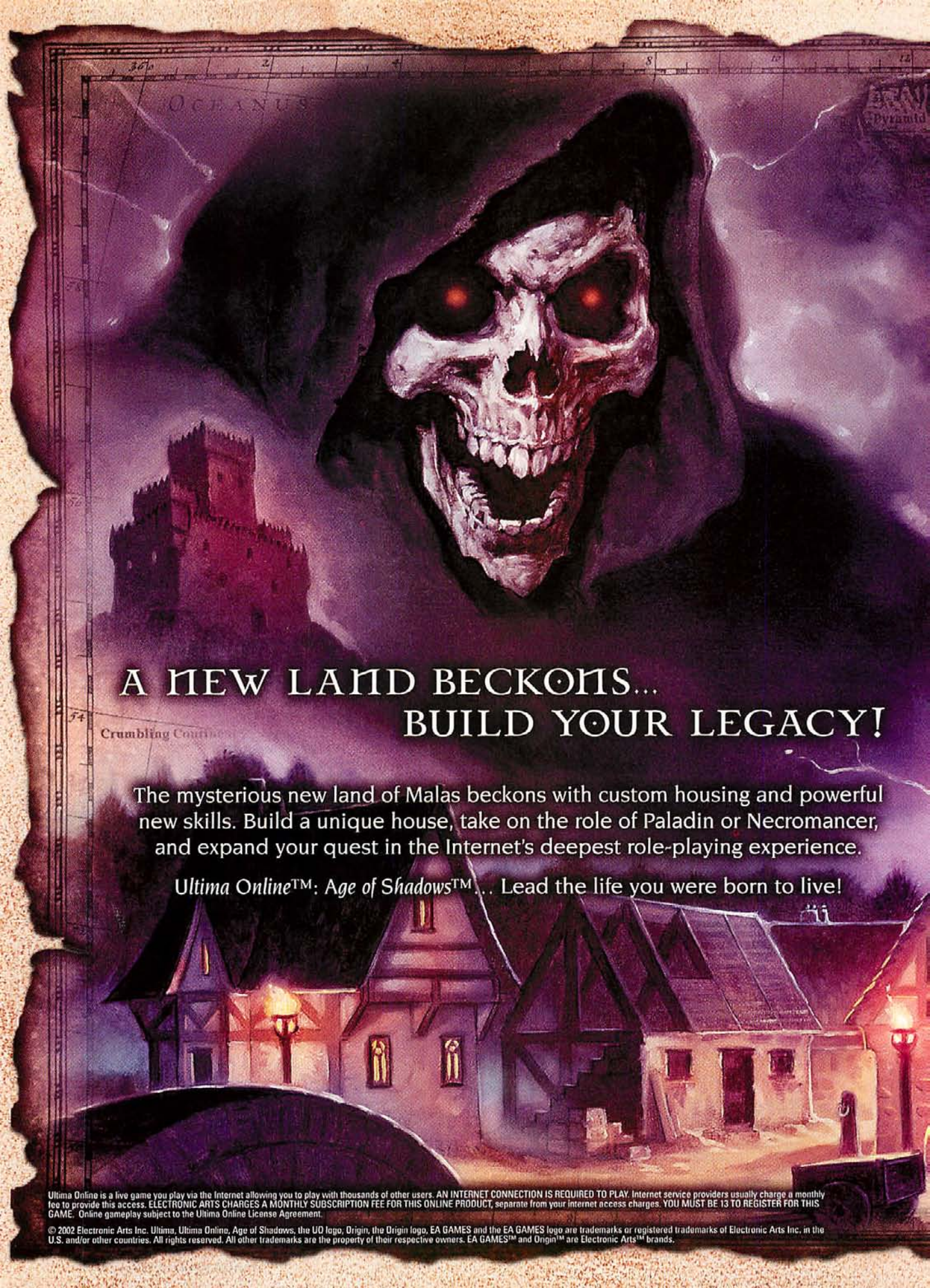
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97 Eagles Strike
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What games will you be playing in the new year?



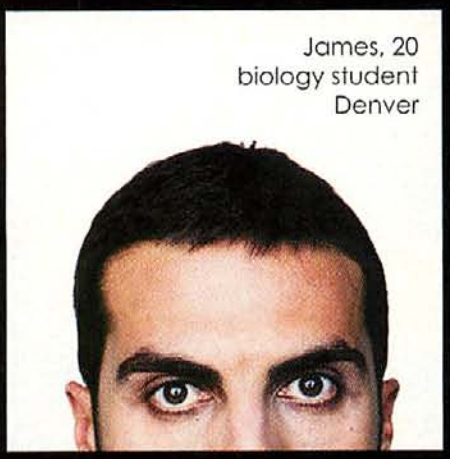
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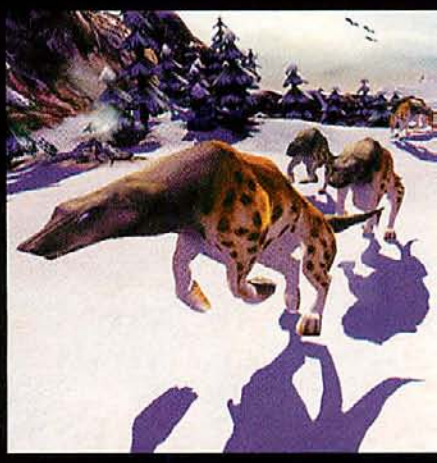




James, 20
biology student
Denver

Jessie the Kid: let's face it. The only good Pirawolf is a dead Pirawolf.

You need to have balance. A good air combat squadron of Vulturesharks, plus a battalion of Hyenadragons, and finally, Turtlelions for the amphibious fights. "Snakes and snails with scorpion tails." These are what real men are made of.





Tommy, 23
computer programmer
San Francisco

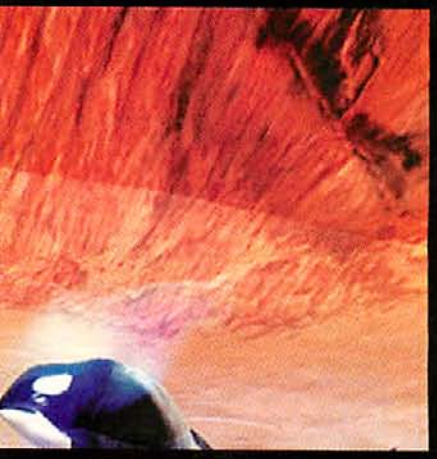


TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence
Comic Mischief

Microsoft game studios

relic

BY AN ARMY OF PIRAWOLVES WOLF).... WHAT WILL YOU DO?



cjm1565: send in my goons. Eagorillas and Rhinobulls.

These boys will punish anything. If the French had them, they wouldn't have needed us in WWII.

END OF STORY, BIZATCH!

Craig, 22
pro skateboarder/slacker
Providence







Tom Tom: let's just say,

MAJOR PAIN IN THE...;)

A Tigebra is pretty wicked, or a Tiganzee. Haven't tried a tiger and a rhino yet.

My bet is it terminates with extreme prejudice. I like that.



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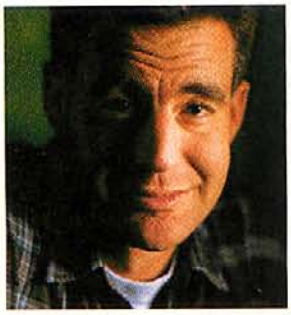
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Band of Boneheads

CGW: keeping America strong

Well, it's been four weeks since our last issue, and I'm proud to note that, once again, we have come through and made another one. Phew. Sometimes I don't know how we do it, to be honest—the endless, grueling burden of playing games and writing about them. When you think about it, we're kind of like 21st-century warriors, fighting the good fight, keeping America safe. Yes, like our forefathers fought for liberty and justice in years past, we sacrifice, we sweat, we do the things you don't want to do—like play *The Italian Job*—so you don't have to. So on behalf of all of us here in the trenches, let me just pause for a moment before the magazine formally begins and say this: You're welcome.

This month was extra grueling on us. Over the course of four weeks, we had about six different cover stories, three of which featured photos of men's abs. If you quickly flip to the cover now, you'll see that we're featuring *Splinter Cell*, which wasn't even in the running at first, but which I now believe to be better than all our other choices combined. The game's been getting rave reviews on Xbox, and we were able to send Scooter up to Canada to get the first hands-on time with the PC version. He liked what he saw: hot Canadian chicks. He also liked the game.

We're kind of like 21st-century warriors, fighting the good fight.

Our other big feature this month is a special report on handheld gaming, written by new previews editor and techno-fetishist Darren Gladstone, who's been floating around the game industry for years before washing ashore, like a dead, bloated body, at *CGW*. Yes, I know these aren't "PC gaming" devices, but handheld gaming is a force to reckon with, and worth a quick look once in awhile. So take a chill pill and read it.

A couple changes to report. First, check out the new, revamped, actually-relevant Top 20 in the Read Me section (page 45). Happily, this is no longer an out-of-date bestseller list of games never played by those who read and write this magazine. Now, it's an up-to-the-minute online poll (conducted at www.gamers.com) of the games you're currently playing and loving. If you don't like this month's results, put the Cheetos down for two minutes, log on, and submit your own votes. Those who don't vote don't get to complain.

Finally, join me in extending a warm welcome to über-smartypants and *CGW* alum Loyd Case, who returns with a monthly column in the Tech section. Those who complain that they can't understand Wil O'Neal's street lingo now have Loyd's geek lingo to complain about. Word to your mother!

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief

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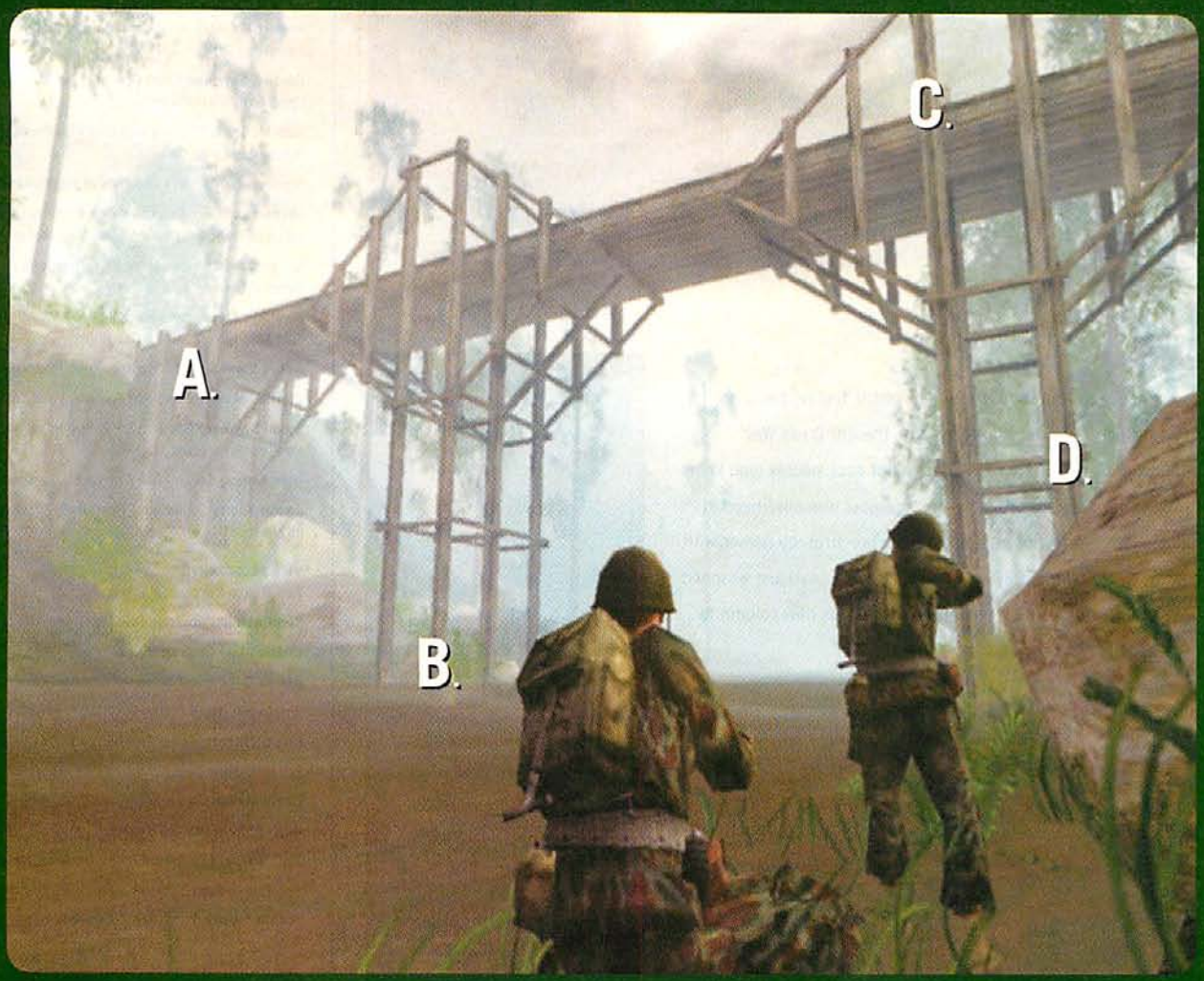
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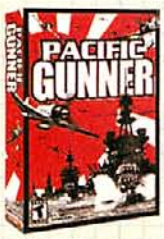
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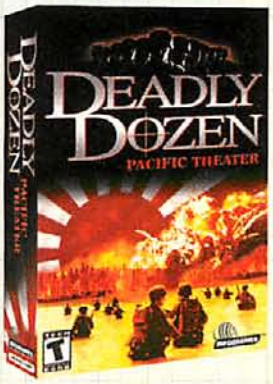
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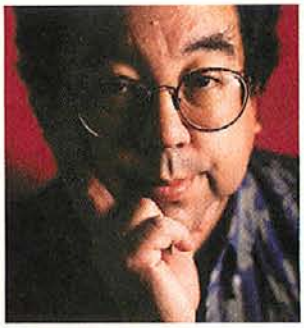


DARREN GLADSTONE

"It was either this or hustling myself at the corner of Polk and Post," said Darren as he feverishly finished the handheld gaming feature in this month's issue (page 60). With this issue, Darren takes up the mantle of Tom Price for *CGW*. Don't worry, he's already put his name down on the donor list for a new liver.

LOYD CASE

Loyd Case hides out in his basement office, testing hardware for ExtremeTech (www.extremetech.com), the Ziff Davis Web publication dedicated to really geeky, but cool, people (you know who you are). Loyd is probably the foremost propeller-head in gaming journalism, but he's also a hardcore strategy gamer with a home LAN and monthly multiplayer parties. Loyd just wrapped up his third book, *The Extreme Gamer's PC*. His new column for *CGW* begins this month.





GEORGE JONES

George Jones kicks himself in the rear end every single day for vacating the top spot at *Computer Gaming World* in order to restart Gamers.com for Ziff Davis Media. His current mission as a freelancer writer/reviewer: uncovering the essence of game design, which is no easy task these days. Just to prove he's not totally bitter, he wrote this month's glowing review of *MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries*.

JACK HORNADY

Washington, D.C.-based illustrator Jack Hornady [Scorched Earth illustration, page 128] has used his RISD art education to create a world of "little people with big heads." Some of Jack's clientele include *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, Johns Hopkins University, Book of the Month Club, and MacMillan Publishing. Jack has been profiled in *Step by Step Graphics* and *Impress Magazine*, a Korean art journal.



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Letters

Carry on my wayward son at cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

LETTER OF THE MONTH

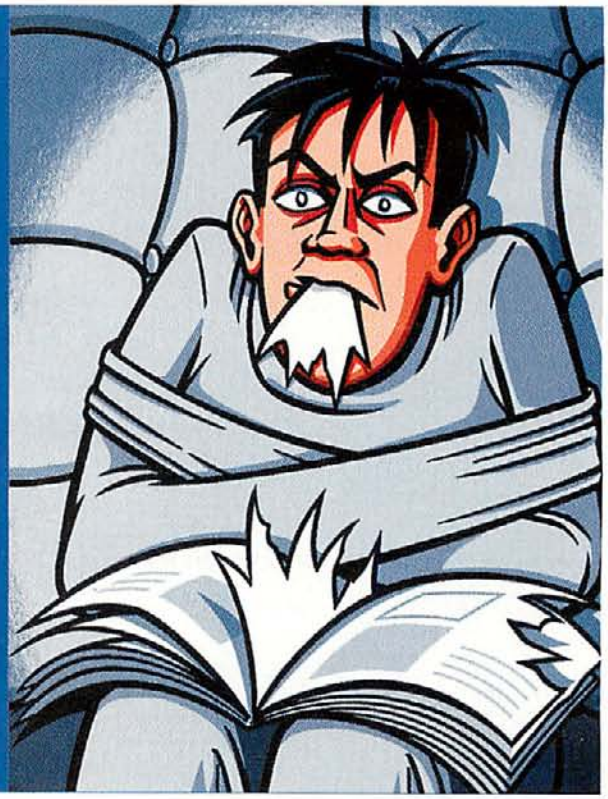
Gaga for Greenspeak

Just wanted to say a whopping THANKS for my boyfriend, who is lying next to me curled into the fetal position upon hearing Jeff "run off to Hawaii and find Zen" Green won't be doing his column any longer.

It started as a good day for the ball and chain, having just completed *Baldur's Gate XL*. But on this day, he had finally done whatever to kill the atypical Baal-looking thingy, and he stalked down to the mailbox to pick up the latest *CGW*—God FORBID he buy a game without getting your OK first. I heard the scream of terror and revulsion all the way up the driveway. The neighbors' dogs haven't shut up since.

So, thanks, Green, for giving me another lunatic to deal with. I would write more, but the people in the white coats are here to take my boyfriend to La-La Land, which I assure, you has no beach. Thanks for the years of funny columns, and one big kick in the ass for abandoning us.

Victoria Majere





Age of PC greatness

Thanks for putting together a sweet layout on *Age of Mythology* [December 2002]! But there is an error on page 99. The caption of the image for the Egyptian deity says "Ra," but the deity shown is actually Horus. No sweat, though, since the rest of the layout is incredible. Looks like I'll really have to get that new hard drive to hold *AOM, UT2003, Unreal II,* and *Quake 4* (if they ever get it together). And then *Halo* is out in 2003. Jeez, I may need a new computer!!!

Congrats on putting out a top-notch magazine.

Kenn L.

Thanks, mom

First off, kudos to everyone at *CGW* for putting up with all the hash they take every month in the Letters section. It's unbelievable how many people write in to tell you how they're canceling their subscriptions because of one article they didn't like—like that guy a few issues ago who said he's dropping because you wrote an article about Macs. Did it ever occur to anyone that if fine publications such as *CGW* held back every article that might conceivably offend someone, all we'd get every month is about three pages detailing the awfulness of the latest 200 *Tycoon* games? Personally, I don't find it too difficult to turn the page past an article I don't want to read, but apparently some people find this burden too much to stomach and would rather cancel their subscriptions than tolerate it. Go figure. Anyway, good job to everyone at *CGW* and keep it up!

Jeff Green's Mom

"All we'd get is three pages detailing the awfulness of 200 *Tycoon* games."

More bots for shooters

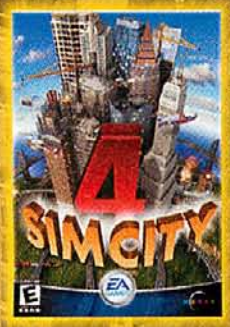
I've been a loyal reader for the past few years, and I remember the agony which was the *Daikatana* demo and the greatness of the *Bejeweled* and *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* demos. While trying out the *UT2003* demo on the December 2002 CD, I was once again beset by the same thought I've had before...where are the bots in most games?

Why are there so few shooters that provide the ability to use bots in the multiplayer games? I had my machine running Capture the Flag with just me and 16 bots...and it was great fun. I'm one of those poor souls too far in the boonies and too poor in the economy to have access to anything faster than dial-up, so home or office LAN use is usually the only multiplayer gaming I get in. Playing *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* with only two players becomes a repetitive who-sees-who-first game after a while...why can't we have a dozen bots to give us the proper feel of the fight? Why can't I lead a full team in my *Nerf*

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MAIL BITES

Damn you, *CGW*! I will figure out how to pronounce "Thierry Nguyen" if it kills me!
Andrew Schran

***Trailer Park Tycoon*—this is a joke, right?**
Zach McDermitt

I hear that you guys have a lot of extra stuff lying around, so I was wondering if you could toss a GeForce4 Ti 4200 or a high-end GeForce3 my way. I'd buy one, but I got no job and my parents are incredibly cheap.
Stefan

What the world needs now is Jeff, sweet Jeff.
ParrotHead

"And no, the Satanists don't sacrifice babies either."

ArenaBlast games? I can just imagine playing the *MOH* Normandy scenario with a few dozen bots running around. RTS games almost always have computer players that can be allies or adversaries, why not shooters?

Cheshire Cat

Attack of the Druids

Just picked up *CGW*. I got a chuckle from most of the letters (and loved the graphic of the rampaging penguin). However, one thing did disturb me, the letter from the Christian asking for games without Druidic content. While I respect other people's choices of religion, I had to shake my head sadly at the spouting of untrue stereotypes.

I am not a Druid, but I am a Witch. Yes, I am male; "Witch" is a gender-neutral term. Do most people even bother to learn that fact before insulting a valid religion? And this emphasizes my point exactly. (Please don't say I'm a Warlock–Warlock means "deceiver" and is an insult to many Wiccans.)

It's debatable whether Druids carried out the human sacrifices that they were supposedly responsible for. The records of Druidic practices are mostly Roman, and Rome didn't think too well of the Druids. It's also wrong to say that they're Satanic. Satanism is a totally different religion than the Druidic practices, and no, they don't sacrifice babies either.

The letter came across to me as vaguely insulting, as well as saddening. Sad because the writer seemed to spew the standard line of the Christian church, and insulting because he didn't even get the facts right. Much like the anti-Wicca page I found that said there was an ancient race of people called the Celtics, it's just done without thought. (The Celtics are a basketball team, the CELTS were the ancient people.)

Ben "Bearfoot" Nelson

I'm writing in response to Michael who voiced his problems with the Druidic content of some RPGs. While the representation of this Celtic caste in gaming is in almost no way accurate historically, there is no reason for him to describe the beliefs of the various Celtic peoples as "Druidic garbage."

Maewyn Succot (St. Patrick to you) sat and helped write the Fenecus (the law of the land tillers) with a group of Irish elders that included three Druids, so a saint disagrees with you. Please stop talking about things you know nothing about, it hurts others and just shows how intolerant the three monotheistic belief systems from the Middle East



really are to the native beliefs of various peoples around the world.

And to you folks at *CGW*, *Mo gra thu fir* (I love you guys). Keep up the great work.

Eammon O'hanradhian

Scorched Earth reactions

At first, I'll admit, I was a little worried. In last month's mag [December 2002] Jeff Green announced his retirement from the back page. And quite frankly, I didn't know what I was going to do without his column. I mean, let's face it, he is a gaming god. When I picked up this month's magazine and red Jeff's article in the front, I couldn't have been happier. Still I thought it was a step down from his normal Greenspeak column.

Then I read Robert Coffey's article. Just as good as Greenspeak if not better. I've been around this magazine for a few years, saw when Jeff took over as editor, the change in looks, etc., and I've been worried about how it would end up turning out. Until now. I look forward to reading Robert's articles every month and I'm not worrying anymore.

iZooz

P.S. Who the hell is Zeppo Marx? I mean I know a Karl Marx, but who the hell is Zeppo?

Since this is America, I would like to voice my opinion after reading Scorched Earth in January's issue of *CGW*. I have been enjoying the back page for a long time now. It's sad, I know, but I think I'm going to be looking forward to it even more. The world doesn't need to be filled



with near senseless hate and garbage, but every person needs *some*. Reading January's back page, and the back pages before it, help me vent without venting because it's true-to-life issues that I can relate to...well I can't say that...OK, so I can't. But I can understand them and agree, or at least understand the emotion that the article presents. I look forward to your next one and I will read my next issue starting from the end. (I bet the advertisers will like that. Raise the price for the cover space.)

Brian "Zeven"

I know that lots of people are going to be upset that Jeff had to give up Greenspeak for his editorial. I understand that Jeffie has a duty as editor to write the column that has "Editorial" pasted across the top, but I think I have a solution that will make everyone happy: Give Jeff a thankless desk job and his old column back, and make Coffey the editor-in-chief.

Sam Jack



Belgian corner

I felt compelled to set the record straight. In your December 2002 issue, you have a nice article on the upcoming cel-shaded shooter game called *XIII*. In the article, you keep mentioning that the game is based on a French comic book series. This is not true. The *XIII* series is not French but Belgian. Both the writer, drawer, and publisher of this comic book series are from Belgium. Although this series is written in the French language, it is not made in France. Calling *XIII* French would be like calling *CGW* Canadian. How do I know this? I'm a Belgian native who ended up in the United States a couple of years ago.

Other than this, no complaints about the magazine. Keep up the good work!

Thierry Wernaers

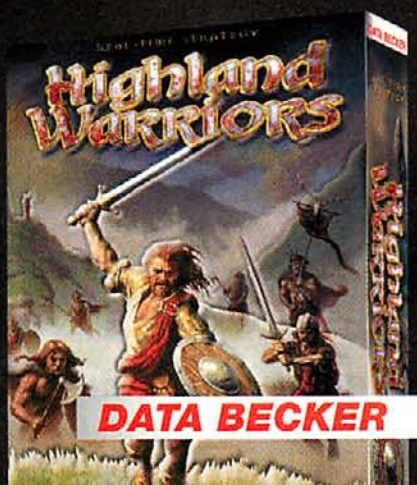


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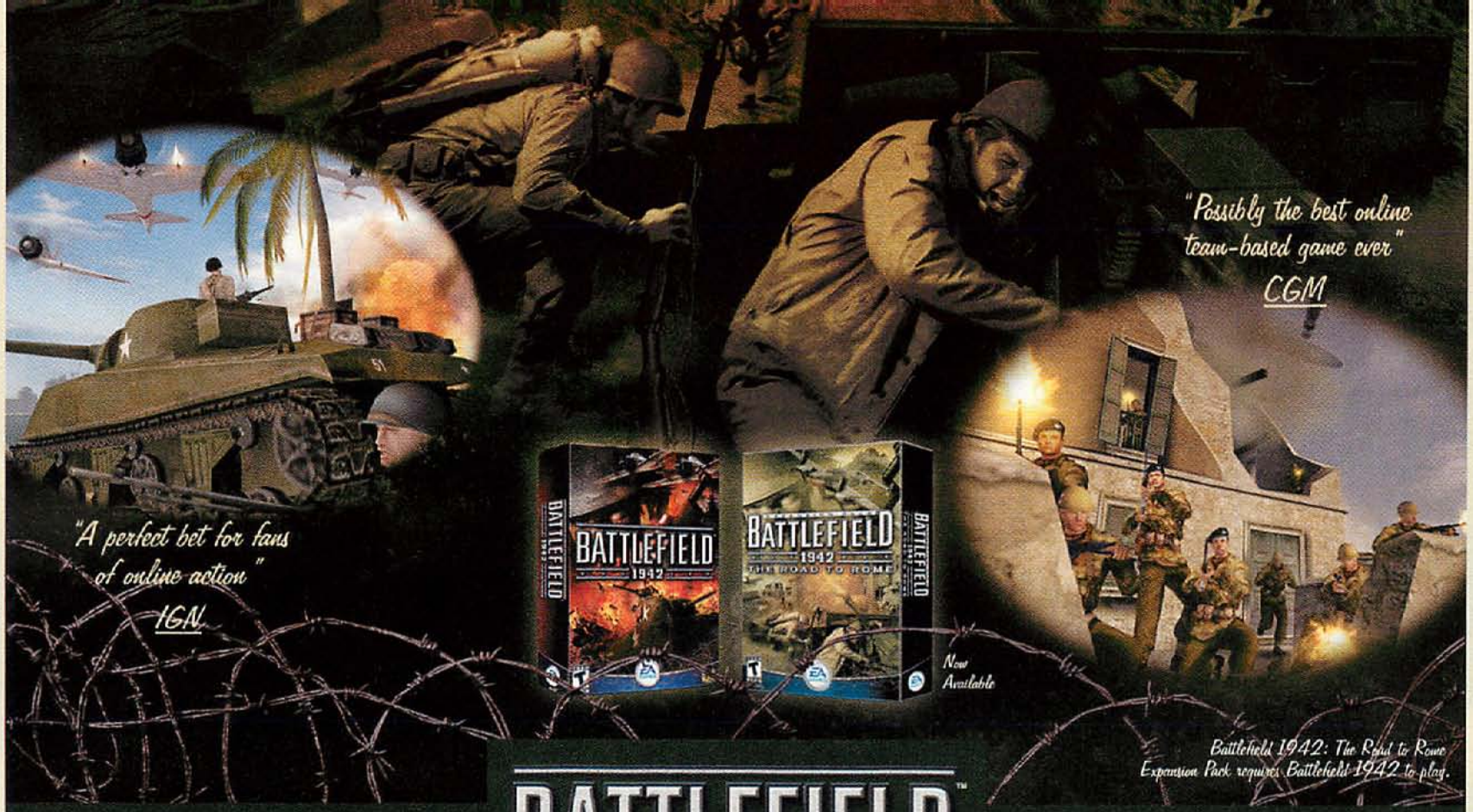






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Italy, July 18- Fighting is still heavy on all fronts with word of new battles raging throughout Italy. Reports continue to stream in of never-before-seen tanks and bombers joining the conflict, a total of 43 military assault vehicles at last count.

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Intel suggests the possibility of online engagement with up to 64 soldiers of unknown allegiance. Armed resistence is expected to be fierce utilizing any combination of 23 lethal weapons. These battles are huge. But then again so is the prize:Victory.

TEEN T Violence CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD ROM

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PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

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Microsoft
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The way it's meant to be played
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Loading...

The hottest shots of the best new games Edited by Darren Gladstone



This screen-shy skeleton is one of more than 160 monsters you'll be stalking in the new *EverQuest*. And yes, the ever-popular rats will be back. (Rat meat is mmm-mmm-good!)

It's manifest destiny time in Norrath, and the race for real estate is on. This is a dynamic world, so you can grab some land, alter the environment, and hopefully, someone'll be around to keep a close eye on your stuff while you're away.

EVER-QUEST II

Four years and hundreds of thousands of RPGeeks in the making, *EverQuest II* is on the way. San Francisco recently hosted a Fan Faire where ye olde computer gamers gathered for mead, meals with online pals, and some comic books. While there, we got a sneak peek at *EverQuest II*, which promises to show up on store shelves in the winter of 2003, or "when it's ready."



See this big fella? He's a prime example of the new 3D graphics engine. All those sexy terms, such as per-pixel lighting, dynamic environment mapping, and a fully programmable surface shader system, are put to good use here.

It won't take years to hotfoot it across the lands this time around. Now that characters are able to mount and control horses and hop in boats, you can finally travel more quickly than just your two feet will allow.

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

With mere weeks left until you can get your greedy little hands on this hot title, we wanted to tease you further. Here, and in the full-blown preview on page 48, is an exclusive, up-close-and-personal look at some of the new weapons, creatures, and highlights of a recent *Unreal II: The Awakening* press junket to scenic Chantilly, Virginia. We could blab on about how slick this game is (and trust us, we do in the preview), but for now, we'll let this picture speak for itself.



Stop and enjoy the scenery in the high-resolution indoor and outdoor environments.

Turtle soup, anyone? Forget the Skaarj—these carapace-laden critters are one of the many new types of aliens that'll be swarming you. And with advanced A.I., they'll be trying to outflank you every step of the way.

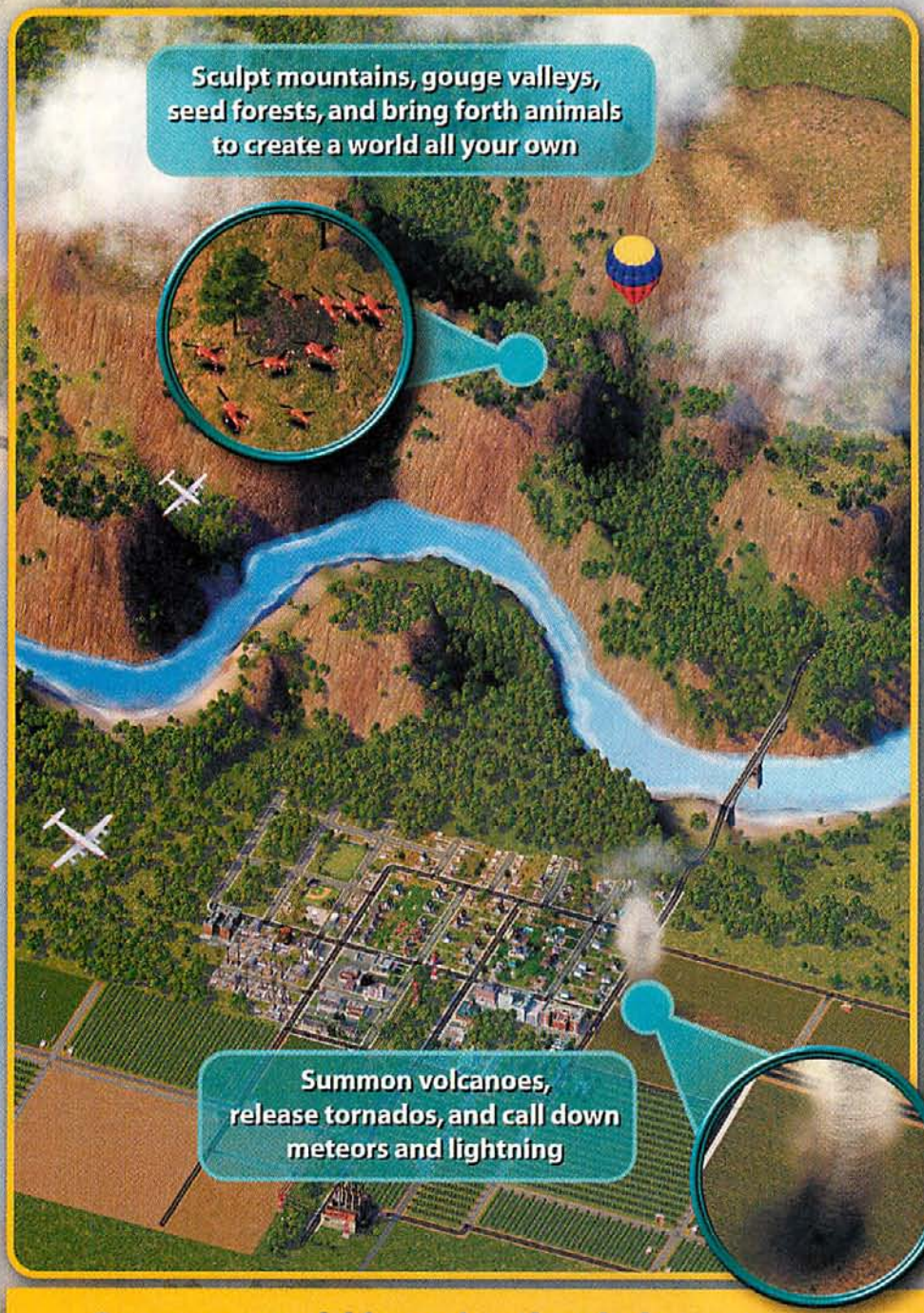


Let there be light! Check out the advanced particle systems—there are some amazing weapon and creature effects throughout *Unreal II*.

A whole new arsenal of whacked-out weaponry allows you to ignite, poison, electrocute, knock down, or blow up your foes. Take this Drakk laser, for example: It can fire rail gun–like shots and it uses live, wriggling creatures as ammo.

God's Hand

May





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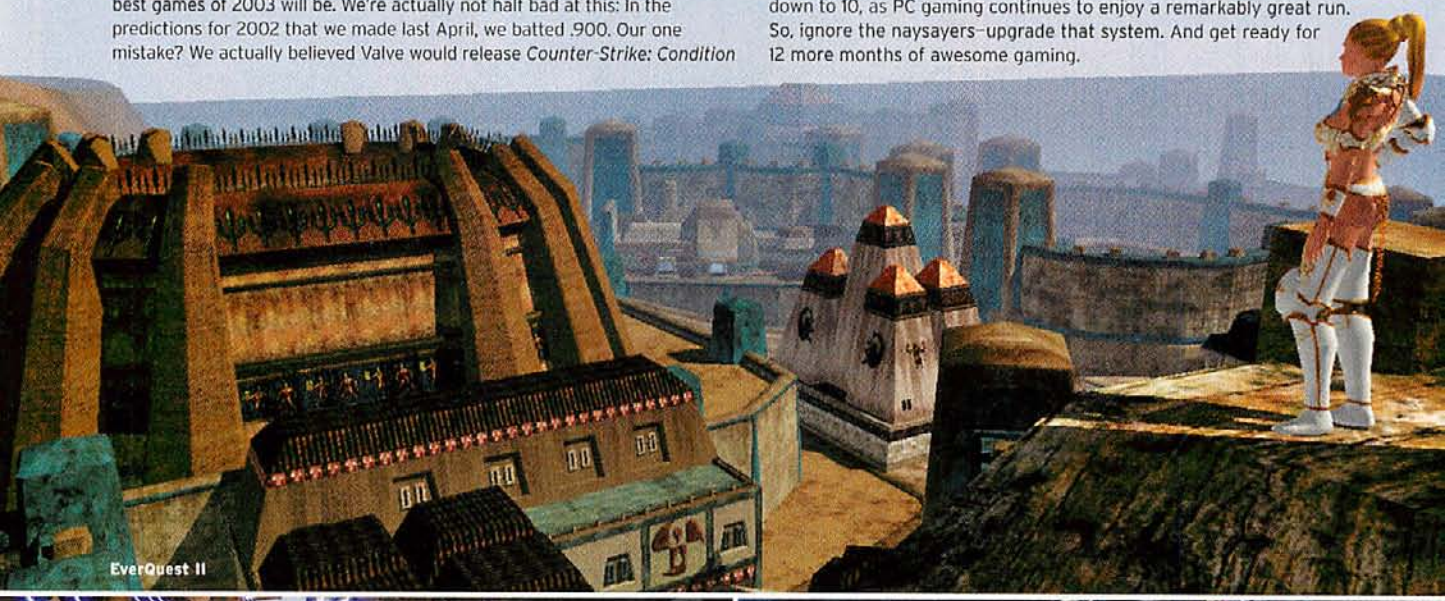
HYPE

CGW's Top 10 for 2003

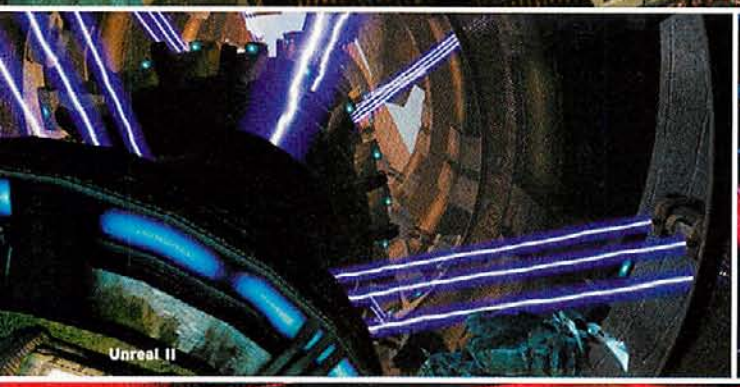
Time to rub our crystal balls By the Staff

Just because Miss Cleo is going to jail doesn't mean she can't see into the future. And just because we haven't yet picked the best games of 2002 doesn't mean we can't tell you what the best games of 2003 will be. We're actually not half bad at this: In the predictions for 2002 that we made last April, we batted .900. Our one mistake? We actually believed Valve would release *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*. We're still hopeful about *CZ* (see page 36), but predicting when Valve will ship a game is something even Miss Cleo isn't dumb enough to do.

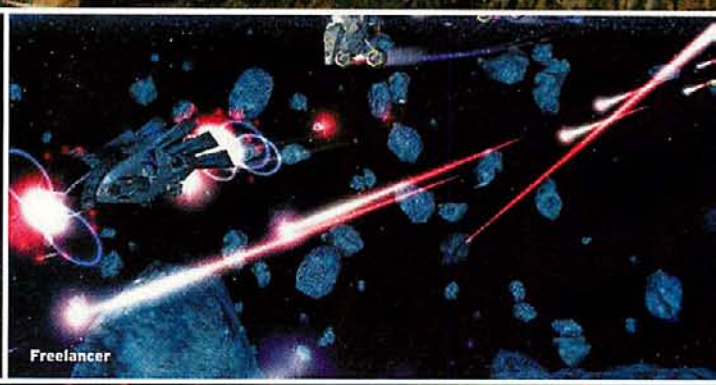
In any case, here's the list. Happily, it took us quite awhile to narrow it down to 10, as PC gaming continues to enjoy a remarkably great run. So, ignore the naysayers—upgrade that system. And get ready for 12 more months of awesome gaming.



EverQuest II



Unreal II



Freelancer



Tron 2.0

INSIDE



GEFORCE FX
Is Nvidia's next chip worth waiting for? **Page 34**



CONDITION ZERO
The latest on the upcoming *Counter-Strike* game. **Page 36**



***WOLF* ADD-ON**
Castle Wolfenstein proudly presents: Nazis! **Page 38**



UT2003 BONUS PACK
More free *UT*-lovin' from Epic. **Page 40**

EverQuest II

The 800-pound gorilla of MMORPGs is leveling up in a big way for the sequel, due late in 2003. Everything is new, from the engine, to the class structure, to the combat and spell system. *EQ* conquered the world the first time around, so despite heavy competition, its second iteration will still be the online game to beat.

Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic

Having conquered *Dungeons & Dragons*, Bioware now moves on to the holy grail of geekdom: *Star Wars*. This single-player, party-based RPG is set more than 4,000 years before Anakin Skywalker stinks up movie screens, to a time when war rages between the Jedi and Sith powerhouses. No word yet on whether Minsc makes a cameo.

Splinter Cell

Tom Clancy attaches his name to the best stealth game since the *Thief* franchise. Less about counterterrorism and more about being a 21st-century ninja, this Xbox port is going to be one of the best games of 2003. Read our cover story to find out why.

Star Wars Galaxies

We think the new *Star Wars* film trilogy is terrible so far ("Who da man? Yoda man!" Ugh!), but that doesn't deter us from geeking out over Sony Online's epic vision for *Star Wars Galaxies*. We can't wait for our chance to be a Wookiee Jedi or a Twi'Lek dancing girl.

Tron 2.0

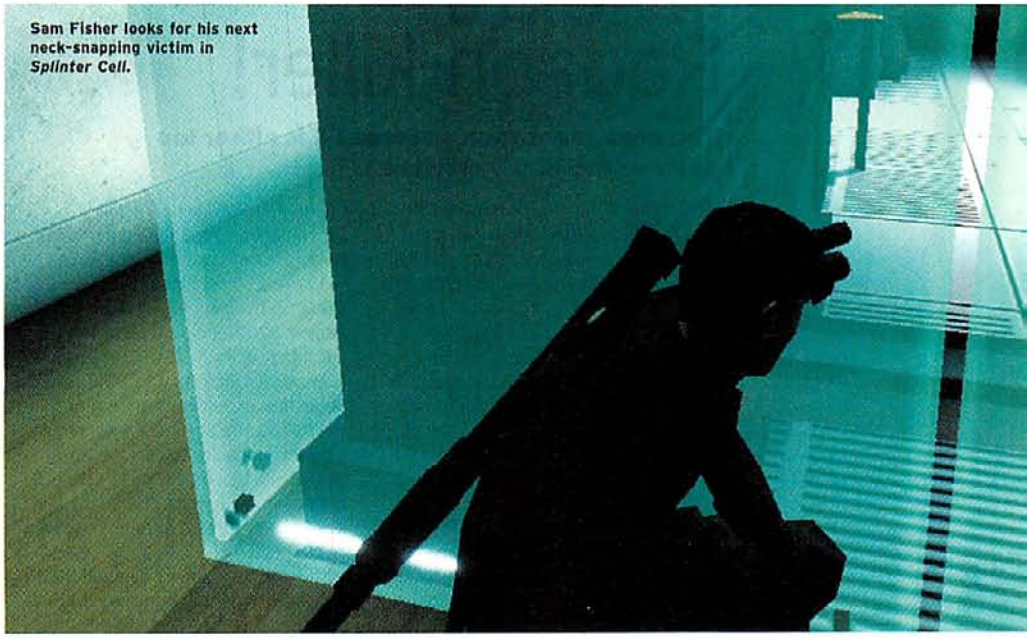
Monolith applies its masterful first-person-shooter skills to make a great-looking game based on a 20-year-old Disney movie. If the "glow" effect doesn't wow you, the deep, *System Shock* 2-inspired gameplay—and Monolith's penchant for smart scripts—should convince you that this is a top 2003 title.

Deus Ex 2: The Invisible War

"There were quite a few things wrong with *Deus Ex*, and we're fixing all of those in *DX2*," says lead designer Warren Spector. With an emphasis on better physics, better A.I., stronger mission design, and a more immersive world, it looks like *DX2* will far surpass the original and become a great futuristic action-RPG.



Warren Spector promises *Deus Ex 2* will be smarter and more immersive than the original was.



Sam Fisher looks for his next neck-snapping victim in *Splinter Cell*.

Unreal II: The Awakening

Any game that arms you with a spider-launching gun can't be half-bad. *Unreal II* is the PC's answer to *Halo*, with spectacular graphics, varied and interesting gameplay, a well-developed story, and a freaky arsenal of weapons to choose from. This will be the shooter to beat in 2003.

Freelancer

In development for more than three years, this ambitious title lets you cruise through space trading, evading authorities, and looting to your heart's content. With hints of *Privateer*, this wonderfully open-ended game will make you forget how long you had to wait for its release.

C&C: Generals

With a pedigree longer than the list of "begats" in Genesis, *C&C: Generals* will continue the great *Red Alert* tradition. It'll have intense multiplayer action featuring three distinct sides, including a collection of "freedom fighters" with scrap-heap tech and terror weapons.

Republic

Can a game about Russian power politics be fun? We're guessing yes, based on the tight design we saw at last year's E3. Players will try their hand at wresting power by any means, good or evil. Finally, it seems that the freedom to do what you want in living gameworlds, like those of *GTA3* and *Morrowind*, is coming to strategy games.

We're geeked about *Galaxies*. Who doesn't want to be a Wookiee Jedi or a Twi'Lek dancing girl?

THE WILD CARDS



Returning for the third straight year as the top wild card is *Half-Life 2*. We have high hopes for the sequel to our readers' favorite game of all time, but when will it ship? No one really knows (not even Valve).

***Doom III*, on the other hand, looks like it will definitely ship this year. So why is it a wild card? Because all we've seen is graphics and not gameplay. We wanna play *Doom III* just like everybody else does, but we're holding off judgment until we do.**

***Rainbow Six: Raven Shield* could be a worthy heir to *Rogue Spear*, but we're not sure it'll be as distinctive. We also like *Rise of Nations*, but we'll have to see how *Civ* elements will work in an *Age of Empires*-style RTS.**

In name, *Full Throttle 2* sounds awesome: How can you not like a game that lets you kick ass and ride a monster motorcycle? Too bad that Tim Schafer isn't involved; hopefully, LucasArts can still make it great.

3D GRAPHICS

Nvidia's Radeon-killer!

The next-generation GeForce FX is either too early or too late By William O'Neal



The GeForce FX runs so hot that it needs vent ducting (not shown), which could crowd your first PCI slot.

If there's one thing this industry is lousy at, it's keeping secrets. The veil of mystery surrounding Nvidia's NV30, the would-be Radeon-killer, had more holes in it than the Shroud of Turin. While rumors of the NV30's specifications have been surfacing since last March, it wasn't until November's Comdex that the Santa Clara-based company let us in on what we pretty much knew already: NV30 is gonna be one ferociously powerful graphics card.

Christened the GeForce FX (an amalgam of "effects" and an homage to the 3dfx engineers working at Nvidia), the card's entirely new architecture is reminiscent of Nvidia's jump from the GeForce2 to the GeForce3. While it's easy to look at the GeForce FX as simply more muscle, Nvidia likes to think of the card as a highly programmable processor, with myriad features that game developers will eventually have a much easier time tapping.

Unfortunately, the GeForce FX still isn't available. Originally scheduled to ship in late 2002, Nvidia now expects the FX by February. The cause of the delay has been a source of considerable speculation, but it seems it's mostly due to Nvidia's desire to reduce the size of the transistors from .15 microns to .13 microns, to conserve energy and reduce heat. The GeForce FX chip also needed 125 million transistors (double the number of the GeForce 4) to achieve DirectX 9 compliance, because DX 9 requires floating-point calculations.

Sure, it's fast–but few titles can even take advantage of it.

Unlike the Radeon 9700's 256-bit DDR-1 memory interface, the GeForce FX uses a 128-bit DDR-2 memory interface, which Nvidia believes to be faster and more efficient. Nvidia refused to specify final clock speeds for the GeForce FX, but it's hinted that at least one iteration of the card will run somewhere close to 500MHz. Similar to the Radeon 9700, the GeForce FX will support AGP 8x, though that feature is academic at this point, since we haven't come close to maxing out the AGP bus.

Since we've yet to get our hands on a board, we can't say how it will benchmark next to the Radeon 9700. Nvidia is claiming that the GeForce FX will have a 30 percent to 50 percent overall performance advantage over the Radeon 9700, and a 40 percent advantage over the R9700 in *Doom III*. However, it's important to point out that *Doom III* is essentially a DX 8 title. Like the R9700, the GeForce FX will require a power connector to operate. Unlike the R9700, though, failing to connect the power cable won't disable the part; it will simply force it to run at a slower clock speed.

Knowing that gamers demand the very best components, we won't be surprised if people shell out $400 for the top-of-the-line graphics card. Nevertheless, the FX's February ETA puts it that much closer to the release of ATI's next salvo (the rumored R10000). Add to that a dearth of titles that will even take advantage of the technology, and we again find ourselves in a place where the hardware may be years ahead of the software.



To show change, textures usually need to be replaced. But the GeForce FX can use vertex and pixel shader programs to show changes, like rusting, over time.

	ATI Radeon 9700	Nvidia GeForce FX
Current core clock	325MHz	500+MHz
Current memory clock	310MHz (DDR-1)	500+MHz (DDR-2)
Number of pixel pipes	8	8
Peak pixel fill rate	2.6Gpixels/sec	4Gpixels/sec
Memory bus width	256-bit	128-bit
Peak raw memory bandwidth	19.8GB/sec	16GB/sec
Manufacturing process	0.15u	0.13u
Maximum addressable memory	256MB	1GB

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Concept art for a French GIGN CT agent.

UPDATE

What's Up with Condition Zero?

And why do Valve games seem to take forever to finish? By Ken Brown

Valve is either full of perfectionists, or it spends more time playing games than finishing them. Whatever the reason, it didn't come as much of a surprise when *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero* failed to ship last year as scheduled. The question remains, though: How does this company have the Midas touch but the speed of molasses?

Condition Zero has undergone a rather convoluted development, so try to follow along. It lived at Rogue Entertainment (now defunct) before Valve adopted it. A few months later, Gearbox inherited the project after its work on the widely acclaimed *Half-Life Blue Shift*. But something must have bothered either Valve or Gearbox—neither will say—because now, it's Ritual's turn. The Dallas, Texas-developer has had a fairly spotty track record (see *Sin*, prematurely shipped by Activision, and the disappointing *Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2*).

But some things emerge from chaos better than they were before. Ritual's lead art director, Robert Atkins, and lead designer, Tom Mustaine, were excited to talk with us about how it's shaping up. It remains focused as a single-player game for *Counter-Strike* cherries who are tired of getting fragged, or for gamers with slow (or no) Internet connections in third-world countries and Canada.

Although *CZ* is a single-player game, it won't have a single story line. Different scenarios cast you as a various elite members of a counterterrorist strike force, such as the Navy SEALs, British SAS, and French GIGN. Atkins says the focus on individual missions gives the designers more flexibility because the setting, characters, and themes are always changing. "This keeps the game fresh from mission to mission, and our designers are able to focus on smaller pieces of the game at a time," he says.

Ritual spent weeks researching real-world situations that would form the basis for the game's missions. A sample of what you can expect:

-Your team must stop a hijacked Russian nuclear-powered icebreaker before it rams the docks of a Norwegian city, causing a massive nuclear accident.

-You are airdropped into a tropical forest in Columbia to fight armed drug lords. The goal is to destroy their manufacturing equipment while extracting local political hostages.

-An armed robbery has gone awry at a downtown Miami Beach bank. Police were fired on with automatic weapons, and there are reports of casualties inside. The robbers are holding hostages and have demanded an armored car or they will kill all the hostages.

Players will have all of the weapons from *Counter-Strike* at their disposal, along with 10 new weapons such as a riot shield, and Galil and FAMAS assault rifles. As you would expect in a *CS* game, you'll be part of a team with several A.I. members who will conduct various tasks. "Through complex animations and sculpted in-game sequences, we've done a lot to add personality to the teammates," Mustaine says.

Atkins says the team is adding custom personality events, unique deaths, scenario-specific dialogue, and special animations to make characters seem more alive. "You'll see characters rolling down stairs when shot, flying out of windows while shooting at you, carrying an injured buddy away from the battle, and other wild and unexpected things." Unfortunately there won't be human co-op play, but there will be bots to play against in offline and LAN play, Mustaine says.

Unless Valve or Ritual adds yet-another era to *CZ*'s already-long history, the game is scheduled to ship by this summer.

"You'll see characters rolling down stairs, flying out of windows, carrying an injured buddy away from the battle, and other unexpected things."



The new characters look great, with nearly double the poly-count of the characters from the first *Counter-Strike*.



"Bob, I really have to go pee!"



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The new *Wolf* add-on lets you play a bunch of squad-based mission with A.I.-controlled teammates, à la *Medal of Honor.*

RECON

Behind Enemy Lines...Again

The return of *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* By Darren Gladstone

Expansion packs are usually patches and a few add-ons masquerading as a new game. But *Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* is actually shaping up to look like a whole new experience. The two most notable changes from last year's shooter: You're fighting Nazi soldiers (not mutants, monsters, or zombies), and this time, you're not alone.

Before getting captured in *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, you led a crack squad of U.S. Rangers into German-occupied territory. In this prequel stand-alone expansion pack, you "relive" those squad-based missions. Initially, it looks like an action-packed *Rogue Spear.* In truth, the computer A.I. handles most of your teammates' actions—and the folks behind *Enemy Territory* are boasting that the bots are bad to the bone. Todd Hollenshead, CEO of Id Software, explained, "In the single-player campaign, each of your squad members has a unique identity. Beyond their different skills, each has intelligent behavior." For example, the medic will reluctantly go the front lines if ordered, but he's smart enough to quickly break for cover.

So, while you can yell for a medic, boss around engineers, and call out waypoints to grunts, the emphasis here is on giving you that multiplayer feel without requiring you to actually go online. And, for when you're ready to play with—gasp—real people, Activision is planning 15 additional multiplayer maps, enhancements to classes (the engineers will be able to build battlefield bridges), and new classes (the covert ops class lets you go prone with a sniper rifle and spot land mines). Prepare to ship out by the end of March 2003.

DUMPSTER DIVER Digging up gold in the bargain bins By Thierry Nguyen

OK, so the atrocious condition in which the *Civ III* expansion was released makes children weep and causes random panic in nearby animals. Instead of dodging a stampede, take those 30 bucks and buy two of the best strategy games ever and one of the simplest and funnest shooters around. You can walk away smiling while some other poor schmuck burns his money upon the desecrated altar that is *Civilization III: Play the World.*



Shogun: Total War $10 + Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns $15 + Serious Sam $5 = Civ III: Play the World $30

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY



THE GOOD
ASHERON'S CALL 2

Look, Ma—a smooth MMORPG launch! Microsoft launched *Asheron's Call 2* with just a few glitches, which they worked out before we had time to get pissed. *CGW*'s resident RPGoons are enjoying the early game experience immensely—we'll have to see how it holds up over time. Look for our full review next month.



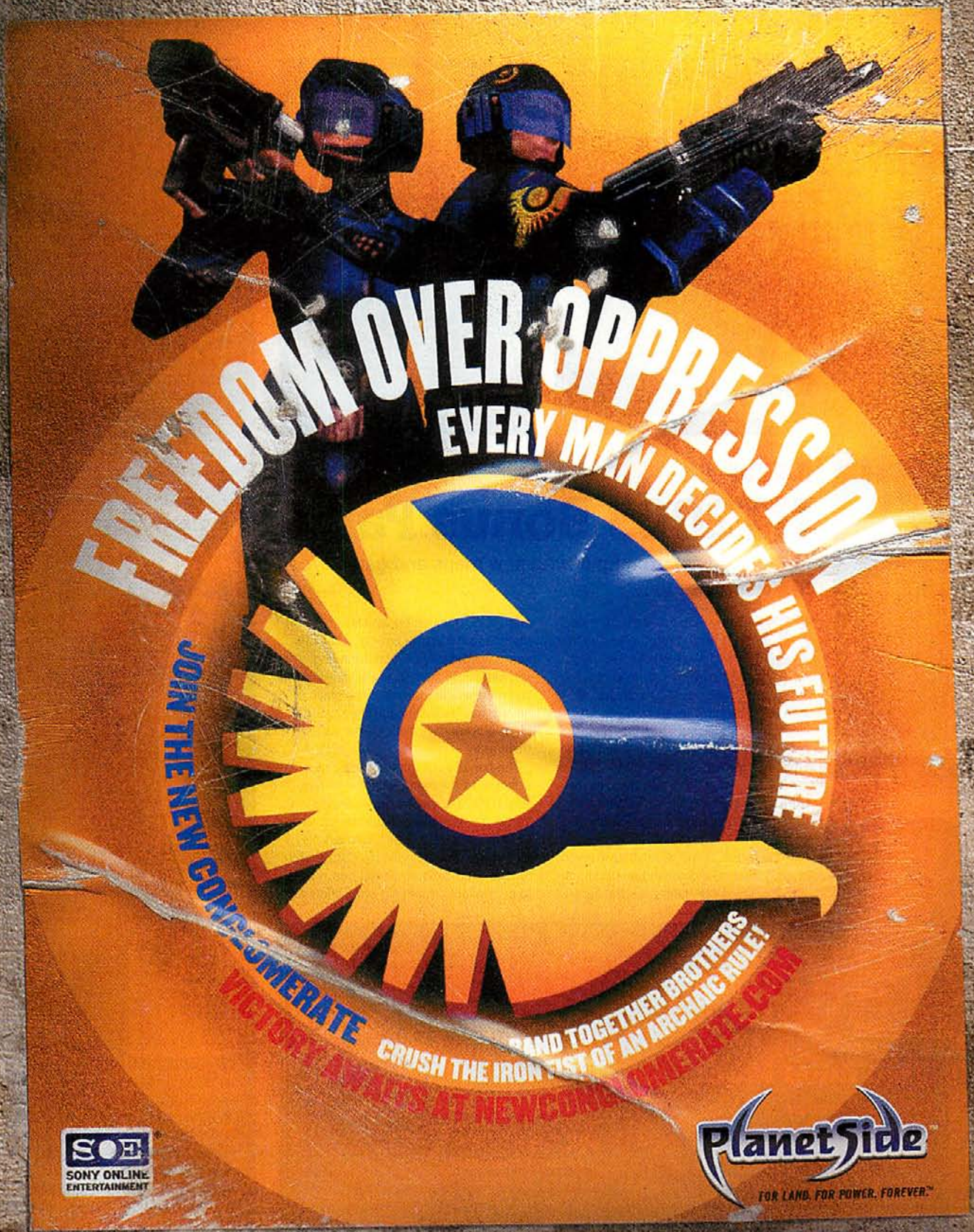
THE BAD
007 NIGHTFIRE

Ay caramba. We got a bad feeling about this when they told us the PC version wouldn't have the cool Aston Martin driving stuff that the console versions have. Great idea! Because, you know, PC gamers don't like the cool parts of games! Just the boring, generic parts! Which, it turns out, is exactly what we got. So, sorry about the November cover story. We blame Halle Berry's breasts.



THE UGLY
CIVILIZATION III: PLAY THE WORLD

What should have been a great expansion from one of the most trustworthy developers on the planet turned into a complete fiasco when it was released in a nearly unplayably buggy state (see our review this issue). Yes, a patch has been released, but this is not supposed to happen with classic franchises like *Civ.* A real disappointment, this one. Et tu, Sid?



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FREEWARE

UT2003 Bonus Pack

More *UT* lovin' from Epic, with new maps and game types

By Ken Brown

One thing you can count on from the folks at Epic is that you'll actually be rewarded for being their customer. Instead of making you shell out $13 for an add-on with a few crummy levels (can you say *Mech* pack?), Epic puts together bonus packs with new artwork, maps, and game types and gives them out for free.

After releasing three bonus packs for *Unreal Tournament*, Epic's working on their first *UT2003* bonus pack, expected in early 2003. According to lead designer Cliff Bleszinski, it will have at least seven maps, including a combination of one-on-one Tourney maps, larger Deathmatch maps, CTF, Domination, and Bombing Run maps. It will also have at least two new game types: Last Man Standing and Mutant. In Mutant, one player is "it" and must evade the rest of the players; he also has invisibility and speed. The other players have a radar that can track the mutant.

The bonus pack will feature all-new artwork, so the maps will look nothing like *UT2003*, says Bleszinski. An Ogg Vorbis music player will also be included, to let players hear their own music during play and to make playlists. Watch for the approximately 50MB bonus pack to be available sometime early this year.

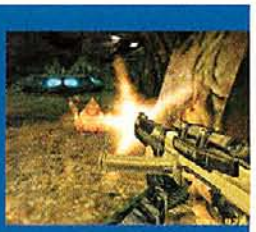


EXTENDED PLAY: HOMEBREW

By T. Byrl Baker

Two Killer Mods

Natural Selection
(www.natural-selection.org)
Just when we thought the *Half-Life* engine couldn't be pushed any further, along comes *Natural Selection*. Although the theme of pitting a team of well-equipped marines against bloodthirsty aliens is a rip-off, *Natural Selection* has plenty of surprises. It combines an intense shooter with an equally intense RTS, implementing a resource model for building units and equipment and giving one marine player the role of commander. Commanders view the action from overhead, doling out resources and giving orders, so the other marines can deal with the biggest threats. The aliens have the ability to evolve into a different type of unit—provided there's enough time and resources.



Wild West
(www.the-wildwest.co.uk)
It's ironic that a good shooter set in America's Old West was created by a team in England, but Wild West is the real deal. This TC for *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* includes everything from cowboys sporting Henry rifles to banditos waiting to stick a knife in your back. You also get to duke it out in classic western settings like a gold mine and a governor's hacienda. All that's missing is the music.

5, 10, 15 YEARS AGO IN *CGW*



Five Years Ago: February, 1998
Five years and countless school shootings and negative mainstream news reports ago, 10 Six's two-page ad featuring a cocked handgun pointed at a sleeping man's head seemed like harmless fun. Violence in games hasn't at all decreased, but extremely violent images like this one, and the infamous *Blood* ad with the guy soaking in a bathtub full of human plasma, are firmly things of the past.



Ten Years Ago: February, 1993
The next time you're groaning about the Golden Age of Gaming, remember that a decade ago, patching a game was as convenient as an alien abduction. Long before auto-updaters and high-speed Internet access, *CGW* printed a monthly Patch File page. Ease of use began and ended right there. Getting the patch meant navigating a BBS with your 14.4 modem while paying an hourly access rate. Or you could ask the publisher to mail you a floppy. Yeah, that was efficient.



Fifteen Years Ago: February, 1988
Talk about a department guaranteed to make you avert your eyes: The Staff Exposed. Intrepid souls who didn't hurl their mag into the nearest open flame were treated to a profile of *CGW* staffers. What an eclectic bunch! Our publisher was into astrophotography and dancing; Johnny Wilson enjoyed comic books, drama, and hockey; and our advertising person, Carole Andrews, liked knitting, gourmet cooking, and people. We're guessing Carole wasn't hosting the weekly *D&D* game.



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GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE DATE
Bratz	Ubi Soft	12/5/02
The Sims Online	Electronic Arts	12/19/02
Riddle Of The Sphinx II: Omega Stone	DreamCatcher Interactive	12/20/02
Vietcong	Gathering of Developers	1/1/03
SimCity 4	Electronic Arts	1/16/03
Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	1/23/02
Highland Warriors	Data Becker	1/25/02
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	2/5/03
Unreal II - The Awakening	Infogrames	2/6/03
IL 2: Forgotten Battles	Ubi Soft	2/6/03
Counterstrike: Condition Zero	Sierra	2/15/03
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	2/20/03
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	2/27/03
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	3/1/03
EVE Online: The Second Genesis	Simon & Schuster	3/4/03
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory	id software	3/25/03

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The kit includes an antenna, USB device (or PCI card), and some software.

NEWS

Piles and piles of files

Game Silo beams loads of gaming crap to your PC each day

By Ken Brown

Here's a service for the insatiable file fanatic who either doesn't have broadband or has better things to do than wait in a queue to download demos and trailers. Game Silo is a wireless service that broadcasts loads of files to gamers, without tying up their online connection. You have to have Internet access for the system to recognize you as a subscriber, but the files are received with an antenna that sits somewhere in your room and drops files onto your hard drive. Several times a day, the service beams 2GB to 3GB of game trailers, demos, screenshots, and patches, so you just have to leave your PC on for a few hours, and you'll get them automatically.

System performance can be affected as the files are copied to your hard drive. If you're surfing the Web, it's not a problem, but if you're playing *UT2003* online, it might be. However, you can disable the system and still get your files–if you turn it back on that same day. Game Silo says that to receive your daily dose, you need to leave your PC on for at least three hours a day (preferably longer). There is no option to receive the files at a preset time.

There's also no way to request certain files or file types. At this point, it's like TV–you get what the company broadcasts. And the company can only broadcast what it gets from publishers. Right now, most of the content is game trailers and interviews with developers. There are some big-name demos and a few unlockable games, but mostly it's preview trailers, game intros, patches, and screenshots.

The introductory price is less than $100, with a monthly fee of $9.95. The network (iBlast) claims that most people can be up and running within 30 minutes. We had some problems getting the system to run in our office: One PC running Windows XP choked on the software, while another installed the software and received the signal without a hitch.

So, who is going to be able to use iBlast? Basically, if you can get a clear HDTV signal at your location (and that's a big "if"), you're a prime candidate for the fledgling service. Currently, it's available only in a limited number of areas (San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Atlanta, Phoenix, and San Diego and surrounding communities). IBlast says it will be rolling out to 150 cities nationwide over the next 10 months, and the company certainly has the means to do it: It's backed by major media conglomerates such as Cox Broadcasting, Gannett, Tribune, and *The New York Times*. The infrastructure is already mostly in place: iBlast uses the same antennas TV stations use for HDTV broadcasting–it's just using the extra bandwidth that's lying dormant until companies broadcast more channels in HD.

Most of the content is game trailers, cut-scenes, screenshots, and interviews.



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IGAMES

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5

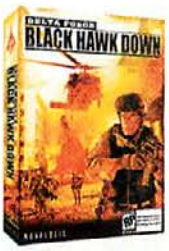
PRE-ORDERS



Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided *(LucasArts)* A massively multiplayer online role-playing game that lets you assume the role of nearly any type of character in the Star Wars universe. Interact with thousands of other players, as well as established characters from the movies.



SimCity 4 *(EA Games)* Don't just build your city, breathe life into it. With god-like powers, sculpt mountains, gouge riverbeds, and seed forests to lay the groundwork for your creation. The impact of your touch will be immediate but not entirely predictable.



Delta Force: Black Hawk Down *(Novalogic)* Engage in urban Close Quarter Battles and long-range sniper fire. Fight through various compelling missions, each with multiple objectives using combat tactics and scenarios provided by former Special Operations Force Soldiers.



Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell *(Ubi Soft)* Infiltrate terrorists' positions, acquire critical intelligence by any means necessary, execute with extreme prejudice, and exit without a trace! The world balance is in your hands, as cyber terrorism and international tensions are about to explode into WWIII.



Counterstrike: Condition Zero *(Sierra)* This new standalone game extends the award-winning Counter-Strike multiplayer game with new maps, weapons, and more while simultaneously introducing new technologies, an extensive single-player campaign, and cooperative play.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5

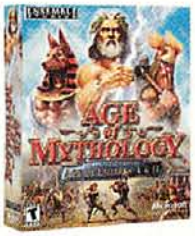
RELEASES



The Sims: Unleashed *(EA Games)* For the first time ever, you will give your Sims the chance to add a furry friend to the family. An expanded neighborhood with 15 additional residential lots and five community lots will give your Sims and their pets a variety of places to meet their neighbors.



The Sims Online *(EA Games)* Take your Sims to a multiplayer online world where you get to be whoever you want to be. Build a network of friends from around the world to enhance your power, wealth, and social standing. In this open-ended world, you choose your role, your attitude, and your destiny.



Age of Mythology *(Microsoft)* Transport yourself to a time when heroes did battle with monsters of legend and the gods intervened in the affairs of mortal men. Wage war using human armies and diplomacy, enhance military and economic performance through resource gathering and trade.



Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets *(Electronic Arts)* Be Harry Potter in a new adventure with more magic, friendship and danger. Learn new spells, undertake new quests, make new friends and challenge new adversaries to confront the powers at the heart of the Chamber of Secrets.



Impossible Creatures *(Microsoft)* A 3D real-time strategy game that pits the player against an evil madman. Using Earth's most formidable animals as building blocks, the player creates an army of unique, mutant monsters in a struggle to protect an unsuspecting world.

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SURVEY

CGW Top 20

New and improved! Readers' choice top 20 games



The kids love carjacking and lead-bashing with *GTA3*.



They also love the Blizzard games like *WarCraft III*.



Max Payne still stands tall in gamers' minds.

RANK	GAME	RATING
1	**Grand Theft Auto III** (Take 2 Interactive)	★★★★★
2	**WarCraft III** (Blizzard/Vivendi)	★★★★½
3	**Max Payne** (GodGames)	★★★★½
4	**Unreal Tournament 2003** (Infogrames)	★★★★½
5	**Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast** (LucasArts)	★★★★★
6	**Medal of Honor: Allied Assault** (EA)	★★★★½
7	**Diablo II: Lord of Destruction** (Blizzard/Vivendi)	★★★★★
8	**Hitman 2** (Eidos)	★★★★½
9	**Battlefield 1942** (EA)	★★★★½
10	**The Elder Scrolls: Morrowind** (Bethesda)	★★★★½
11	**Mafia** (Take 2)	★★★½☆
12	**Neverwinter Nights** (Infogrames)	★★★★½
13	**Age of Mythology** (Microsoft)	★★★★☆
14	**No One Lives Forever 2** (Sierra)	★★★★½
15	**Civilization III** (Infogrames)	★★★★★
16	**Aliens Versus Predator 2** (Sierra)	★★★★½
17	**Madden NFL 2003** (EA)	★★★★★
18	**Rollercoaster Tycoon** (Infogrames)	★★★★☆
19	**The Sims: Unleashed** (Maxis/EA)	★★★★★
20	**The Sims: Hot Date** (Maxis/EA)	★★★★½

This month, we're proud to bring back the Readers' Choice Top 20. Rather than a list of best-sellers, the Top 20 is derived from the results of a survey of 1,000 readers' favorite games from the last two years. Anyone can vote at our website, www.computergaming.com, and we'll print the results each month. If you're ever in doubt about what to play, this is a good place to start.

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Impossible Creatures
(Microsoft)
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A real-time strategy game of combat and discovery, where imagination and experimentation are your biggest allies in a struggle against evil.

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- Unprecedented replay ability
- Fast and ferocious multiplayer games focus on furious, combat-driven action.



The Sims Online
(EA Games)
Regular Price: ~~$49.99~~
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Play The Sims online with thousands of other Sims players!

Features:
- Create and customize your Sim to be just like you
- Build your dream home, the trendiest boutique, or the hottest neighborhood hangout around
- Develop a network of friends, go into business with your house mates, improve the neighborhood, or open a hoppin' club
- Includes 1 month of game time.



Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell
(Ubi Soft)
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Multiple award winner including the E3 Game Critics Award for best action game and the ECTS overall best game of the show award.

Features:
- Covert stealth-action game
- Revolutionary lighting, shadowing, animation, physics, and sound effects create an astonishingly realistic tension-filled experience
- Diverse stealth techniques bring game-play possibilities to a new level

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PIPELINE

Our latest educated guesses By Di Luo

Keep in mind that release dates are basically best guesses for most companies until the game gets closer to being finished. Generally, the farther along the game is, the more accurate its release date, but even then, anything can happen.



1 *XIII:* We previewed this comic book-based shooter in the December issue; little more has been revealed since then, except that the game will be delayed till Q4 2003. Powered by the *Unreal II* engine, this game uses pixel-shaded graphics and is full of stylish cartoon action. As an indication of how far off the game is, Ubi Soft, its publisher, still hasn't created an English language webpage. Even the info on the French page is scanty. According to Babblefish, you will be the embodiment of *XIII*, as it "celebrates it hero of the data base worship." Once we figure out what that means, we'll tell you more about the game.

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
1503 A.D. The New World	EA	Q1 2003
All American: The 82nd Airborne	Shrapnel	Q2 2003
American Conquest	CDV	Q2 2003
Battlefield 1942: The Road to Rome	EA	Q2 2003
Black Moon Chronicles: Winds of War	Cryo Networks	Unknown
Breed	CDV	Q2 2003
City of Heroes	NCsoft	Q2 2003
Civil War: War Between the States	Walker Boys	Unknown
Command & Conquer: Generals	EA	01/21/03
Conflict: Desert Storm	SCi	Q4 2002
Cossacks: Napoleonic Wars	CDV	Q3 2003
Crusader Kings	Strategy First	Q1 2003
Dark Age of Camelot: Shrouded Isles	Mythic	Q4 2002
Deadlands	Headfirst	Q3 2003
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	Q1 2003
Deus Ex 2	Eidos	Q2 2003
Doom III	Activision	Q2 2003
Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	Q4 2002
Driver 3	Infogrames	Q2 2003
Escape from Alcatraz	HIP	Q1 2003
EverQuest II	Sony	Q4 2003
Freelancer	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Full Throttle II	LucasArts	Q3 2003
Galactic Civilizations	Strategy First	Q1 2003
Ghost Master	Empire	Q1 2003
Gothic II	JoWood	Q4 2002



2 *Praetorians:* The folks that brought you the *Commandos* series are branching out. Instead of a squad-based tactical game, their upcoming project is a real-time strategy game set in the time of Julius Caesar. Gorgeous to behold, this game promises to combine realistic factors like formations and terrain with the playability and speed found in traditional RTS games. *Praetorians* will focus entirely on battles, and there will be no resource management beyond controlling towns for recruiting purposes. If all goes well, you will be able to begin your conquest of the known world by March of 2003.

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Hannibal	Arxel Tribe	Q2 2004
Halo	Microsoft	Q2 2003
Harpoon 4	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Heaven and Hell	CDV	Q2 2003
Hidden & Dangerous 2	GOD Games	Q2 2003
Highland Warriors	Data Becker	Q1 2003
Homeworld 2	Sierra	Q3 2003
IGI2: Covert Strike	Codemasters	Q1 2003
Imperium Galactica III	CDV	Q2 2003
Impossible Creatures	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Indiana Jones	LucasArts	Q1 2003
Lineage II	NCSoft	Q3 2003
Lionheart	Interplay	Q1 2003
Lock-On	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Lords of the Realm III	Sierra	Unknown
Max Payne II	GOD Games	Unknown
Metal Gear Solid 2	Konami	Q1 2003
Morrowind: Tribunal	Bethesda	Q4 2002
NBA Live	EA Sports	Q4 2002
PlanetSide	Sony	Q1 2003
Postal 2	Unknown	Unknown
Praetorians	Eidos	Q1 2003
Pro Race Driver	Codemasters	Q1 2003
Quake 4	Activision	Unknown
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	02/04/03
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	Q1 2003
Republic: The Revolution	Eidos	Q2 2003
Robin Hood: Legend of Sherwood	Strategy First	Q4 2002
Rolling Thunder	Strategy First	Q2 2003



3 *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down:* One of the more controversial games to be released since *GTA3*, the newest *Delta Force* focuses on Operation Restore in Somalia. Oft criticized for being insensitive to the events of the Battle of Mogadishu, *Delta Force* is supposed to be a shooter merging real-life tactics with the excitement of action-oriented games. Originally slated for a holiday release in 2002, it's been pushed to early 2003. According to Lee Milligan, NovaLogic's president, the company wanted to "invest some additional time in 'polishing' the title to make sure that when it does hit the streets, it will be a benchmark for the genre."

GAME	PUBLISHER	EXPECTED
Sam and Max 2	LucasArts	Q1 2004
Sea Dogs II	Bethesda	Q4 2002
Shadowbane	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
SimCity 4	EA	Q1 2002
Sovereign	Sony	Q1 2004
Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
Stars! Supernova Genesis	Mare Crisium	Q1 2003
Star Trek: Elite Force II	Ritual	Q1 2003
Star Wars Galaxies	LucasArts	Q1 2003
Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	Q1 2003
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	Q1 2003
Team Fortress 2	Sierra	Unknown
The Movies	Lionhead	Unknown
They Came From Hollywood	Octopus Motor	Q2 2003
Thief III	Eidos	Q2 2003
Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness	Eidos	Q1 2003
Total Annihilation 2	Infogrames	Q4 2003
Tron 2.0	Monolith	Q2 2003
Tropico 2	GOD Games	Q2 2003
Unreal II	Infogrames	Q1 2003
VietCong	Take2	Q1 2002
Vultures	CDV	Q4 2003
Warlords IV	Ubi Soft	Q1 2003
World of WarCraft	Blizzard	Unknown
World War II	Codemasters	Q4 2002
XIII	Ubi Soft	Q4 2003

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The itsy, bitsy spiders went up the soldier's suit...



This bad guy's got a hot ass—thanks to your Takkra cubes.



2202 Olympic Games' newest sport: bullet catching. Here, Blargh from Team Skaarj is going for the gold in a hail of gunfire.

UNREAL II: THE

Halo, goodbye. We've waited for three years and found something

AWAKENING

better

By Darren Gladstone

When you talk about a game for more than three years (in our case, running a cover story and an updated preview in the past year alone), it had damn well better be good. Still, after all this time, people carry on like *Unreal II: The Awakening* is the second coming for PC gaming. Is it? Well, we're not bowing and praying yet, but after a hands-on preview of a majority of the game, we can honestly say that *Unreal II* is shaping up to be the first-person shooter to beat in 2003.



Heavily armed and armored: This is one of the guys you'll be able to boss around.



Think this pitbull-from-hell looks tough? You should see his owner...

Is *Unreal II: The Awakening* the second coming of PC gaming?

Great graphics redux

We've already teased you about the level of detail in the world, and yes, after all this time, it continues to make jaws drop. Firing off a smoke grenade and then watching the air clear as you launch rockets at an enemy is just one example. The GOLEM skeletal system adds realistic textures and animations to the creatures populating the game, whether they walk on two legs or skitter along on eight.

You'll also find more than 30 areas strung across 13 missions. Varied exotic locales include swamps, wintry outposts, underground weapons facilities, and spaceships to name but a few—it's standard shooter fare. The groundbreaking stuff that makes this title stand out is the tightly scripted story, the freaky firepower, and a couple RTS elements thrown into the mix.

An epic adventure

Half-Life set the standard: It showed that you could create a first-person shooter with a halfway-decent story line. While other games focus on multiplayer matches, *Unreal II*'s deep story line is so interesting, you won't miss blasting apart your buddies (well, maybe you'll miss it a little). Legend Entertainment, the company behind *The Wheel of Time*, has a great pedigree when it comes to storytelling. Within the game are *Medal of Honor*-caliber scripted events that help add tension: Characters shout warnings to you as enemies swarm all around. An alien disables an elevator you're in, causing it—and you—to plummet. It's engaging stuff.

Sure, you can race from one mission to the next, but there are payoffs for exploring your patrol ship and talking to your crewmates aboard the Atlantis. With branching dialogue choices, you can learn more about the backstory, piss off your crewmates, or gain access to new weapon modifications by talking to your engineer at the right time.

Unreal II also has some of the most creative—and sinister—weaponry ever conceived in a game. Among our favorites: a flamethrower that can hose the floor with a layer of napalm, and a versatile grenade launcher that shoots off incendiary gas, smoke, concussion blast, and electromagnetic pulse rounds. To counterbalance the ubiquitous shotgun/rocket launcher arsenal, there's a whacked-out alien-weapon arsenal. How about, for example, a gun you arm with an arachnid's reproductive organs in order to shoot spiders at your target? Another creative weapon is the Takkra. In your hand, the weapon looks harmless. But when thrown, these evil metallic balls (how many times will you see those words together?) circle you defensively and shoot incoming bullets out of the air. Or the balls can attack enemies on their own.

OK, so the freaky firepower has us lamenting the absence of multiplayer. Thankfully, a carryover from a proposed multiplayer mode appears in the final game. In a few RTS-like levels, you need to race around, grabbing field generators, creating laser barriers, setting up turret emplacements—heck, you can even directly command some soldiers to help repel invaders.



A bad day at the VD clinic.

Corporate mouthpieces say all that's left to do now is minor bug fixing and balancing. Barring any lame "Unreal" jokes about meeting deadlines, they swear the final game will be shipping shortly after this issue hits the stands in January.

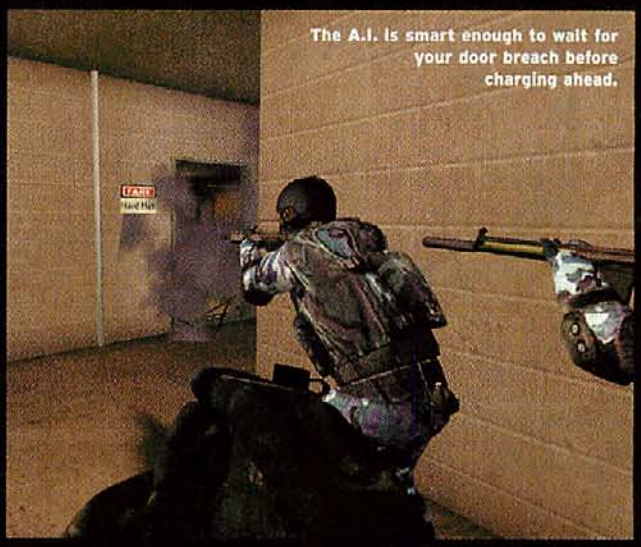
GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: **INFOGRAMES**
DEVELOPER: **LEGEND ENTERTAINMENT**
GENRE: **FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER**
RELEASE DATE: **Q1 2003**

Improved A.I. means you can actually rely on your teammates to do some damage.



The *Unreal* engine delivers graphics more detailed than those in any other *Rainbow* game.



The A.I. is smart enough to wait for your door breach before charging ahead.

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: R

Shielding the world from terrorism By Di Luo

RAVEN SHIELD

Some fanatics never learn. Given all the terrorist plots across the globe that *Rainbow Six* has thwarted, you'd figure the bad guys would just give up. And yet, they're at it again in *Rainbow Six: Raven Shield*. That's right—the granddaddy of tactical shooters returns with a huge face-lift, more cool toys, and, most important, a new brain.



The outdoor environments are a sniper's paradise.



Raven Shield will be full of right-wing fanatics rather than Arab extremists.

The granddaddy of tactical shooters returns with a huge face-lift, more cool toys, and a new brain.

Judged by its cover

You'll notice that *Raven Shield* boasts vastly improved graphics over its predecessors. Based on the latest *Unreal* engine, this game easily rivals most action-oriented shooters on the market—just don't expect to see any flak cannons or huge explosions. What you will get, though, are incredibly detailed and gritty settings. You can see the wrinkles on the uniforms and the dirt on the walls.

But consider yourself warned: From what we've seen, these visual improvements may come at a cost. Though minimum system requirements are supposed to be in the 600MHz range, the *Raven Shield* beta copy we looked at chugged quite a bit when played at medium detail on our middle-of-the-road 1.3GHz machine with a GeForce3 card. The developers will probably optimize performance before release, but those who want to enjoy all the details at an acceptable framerate will likely have to shell out for the latest and greatest graphical workhorses.

If they only had a brain...

The *Rainbow Six* series is reaching out to new fans with more manageable tactical controls. What we've seen of the new features should make the game more appealing to newbies without disappointing fans of the previous installments.

Central to these improvements is your teammates' behavior. The A.I.-controlled comrades in previous games charged ahead like mindless berserkers, and usually got their dumb digital asses filled with lead. They're much smarter now. This A.I. competently watches your flanks and advances at the pace you set. They can also be given specific orders, such as opening doors or tossing flashbangs into a room before an assault. The command interface was a bit awkward in the beta we tested, but those kinks should be worked out before release.

Your capability to conduct a stealth assault is enhanced by the ability to slowly open doors with a cautious dial of the mouse wheel. There's something satisfying about inching a door open, bit by bit, before throwing a grenade into a room of unsuspecting enemies.

One of the most important aspects of any *Rainbow* game is the planning phase, during which you plot out your teammates' route of attack. The interface here has been simplified to make it accessible to new players, and there's even an option to run simulations of the plan before going into the real thing.

There's also an arsenal of equipment to choose from before you go out into the field. You'll find more than 50 weapons at your disposal, including light machine guns for fire suppression, and Uzis for secondary weapons in situations where the Beretta proves too weak. Flashbangs have also been improved; they'll effectively blind you and leave your ears ringing, instead of lamely exploding like they did in previous versions. Even more impressive are improvements to your reconnaissance capabilities. Sniper rifles can now be equipped with thermal sights used to "see" through buildings. Likewise, your assault troops can use heartbeat detectors to listen for occupants inside a building—though you won't know whether they're friend or foe.



The in-game tactical map allows you to track the progress of your team in real time.

With its many improvements, *Raven Shield* looks very promising and should prove to be a worthy successor to this vaunted franchise. If all goes well, look forward to saving the world yet again in the first quarter of 2003.

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: UBI SOFT

DEVELOPER: RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT

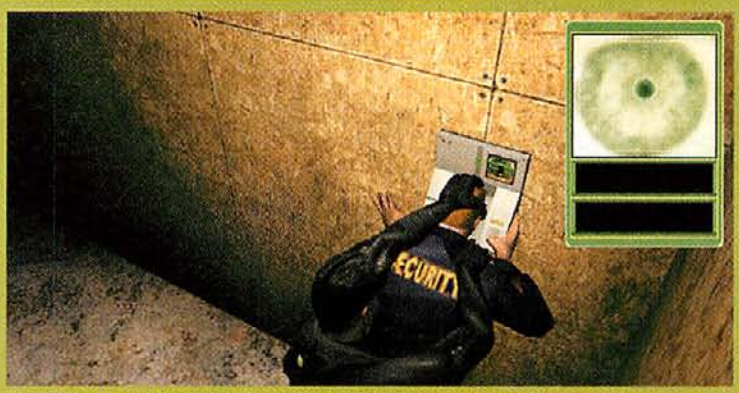
GENRE: TACTICAL SHOOTER

RELEASE DATE: Q1 2003

Tom Clancy's splinter

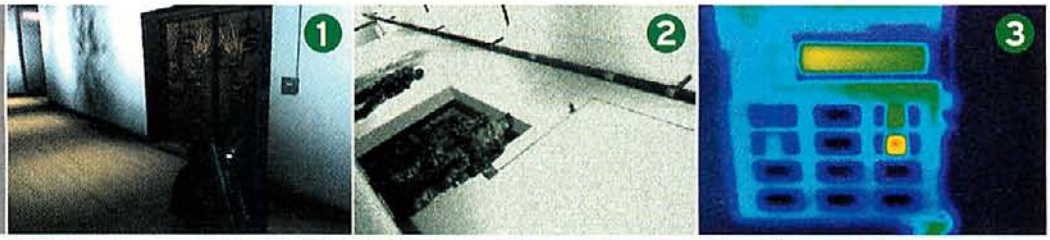
SPLINTER CELL MAKES A STEALTHY–AND ASS-KICKING–LEAP TO THE PC

BY THIERRY NGUYEN



Having trouble getting past a door with a retinal scanner? You can't use a hacksaw on some poor fool like Jack Bauer did, but you can grab someone with appropriate clearance and shove his face onto the scanner.





B&E 101: Wait for someone to enter the keycode; use thermal vision to see the heat signature on the keypad; figure out the code.

PUBLISHER: **UBI SOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBI SOFT MONTREAL**
GENRE: **THIRD-PERSON SNEAKER**
RELEASE DATE: **JANUARY 2003**

Meet Sam Fisher, Tom Clancy's latest and greatest hero. He's not like CIA analyst-turned-president Jack Ryan, or like *People*'s sexiest man alive, Ben Affleck. Sam Fisher is a medley of *G.I. Joe*'s Snake Eyes, *Metal Gear Solid*'s Solid Snake, and *Escape From New York*'s Snake Plissken: a straightforward, ruthlessly efficient secret agent with an aged soldier's attitude. He's also the focus of the newest game in the Clancy universe, *Splinter Cell*, an Xbox darling that's getting the PC treatment—and we can say with authority, after getting some hands-on time with the PC version, that the treatment it's getting is very, very good.

NO BACKUP

Splinter Cell is a deliberate departure from other Tom Clancy games. While previous excursions have focused on either counterterrorism or infantry squads, *SC* focuses on a lone-wolf operative. Mathieu Ferland, the senior producer, says the team simply felt it was time for an espionage-focused, solo, stealth-action game to flesh out the Clancy-verse, as it were.

The premise has Fisher as the first operative for a new division of the National Security Agency, called Third Echelon. It's a covert-ops division that has been given discretion to do whatever necessary to protect America, even if that involves kidnapping, assassination, or spying on fellow agencies. The term "splinter cell" refers to the fact that Fisher acts alone and with extraordinary freedom. In true Clancy fashion, there are a whole lot of whiz-bang gadgets, and the plot centers on a conflict between Georgia (the country in Russia, not the state next to Alabama) and China—think of it as an extension of Clancy's *The Bear and the Dragon*. Russia and China were chosen because, as Ferland puts it, "They're still seen as unstable threats to our national security, and they have the advanced technology necessary to carry out some of the threatened attacks in *SC*."

To ensure realism, the scriptwriter for *SC* met with NSA officials, and, as it did with the *Rainbow* games, the team had access to an NSA technical advisor, Mike Grasso. Also, Clancy himself signed off on the game's concept to make sure it fulfilled his requirements for realism in story, setting, and equipment.

Fisher's look went through several changes, fluctuating from a tuxedo to a Navy SEAL look. "Civilian suits are nice if you're a party spy, but in the field, a Saville Row suit isn't going to get the job done," says Ferland. Martin Caya, the lead concept artist and lead character modeler, researched several types of recon suits before deciding on a variant of the Navy SEAL scuba scout outfit as the basic framework for Fisher's appearance. Also, the hero isn't a young hotshot, so the team went for the seasoned-veteran look.



In the real world, night-vision goggles are completely different from thermal imaging goggles. But since this is a game, the development team assumed that in the future, both technologies can be contained in one set of goggles. Voilà! Sam's goggles can switch between image enhancement and thermal imaging.

THIS IS A DELIBERATE DEPARTURE FROM OTHER TOM CLANCY GAMES.



This is the optimal Sam Fisher situation: The enemies are clueless to his presence, he's poised to strike, and he has a really big gun with which to take them out.

21ST-CENTURY NINJA

Splinter Cell is often described as a *Metal Gear Solid* killer. In reality, it's more a combination of *MGS* and *Thief*. Like *MGS*, you're a government badass who sneaks around bases, avoids guards, and chats it up with your superiors via radio. There's no handy radar showing where your enemies are, and you can't see your enemies' vision cones; like *Thief*, you have to rely on your own stealth meter (explained in the game fiction as some sort of "phosphor-based optic" doohickey), which tells you how hidden you are. Additionally, you don't have many bullets, and you won't get many during the course of a mission, so subtlety and stealth are emphasized over killing power. *SC* focuses on enemy observation, figuring out the best way to move forward and disable nearby guards and alarms, while avoiding detection. Thankfully, Fisher has a host of moves and toys that help him accomplish all this.

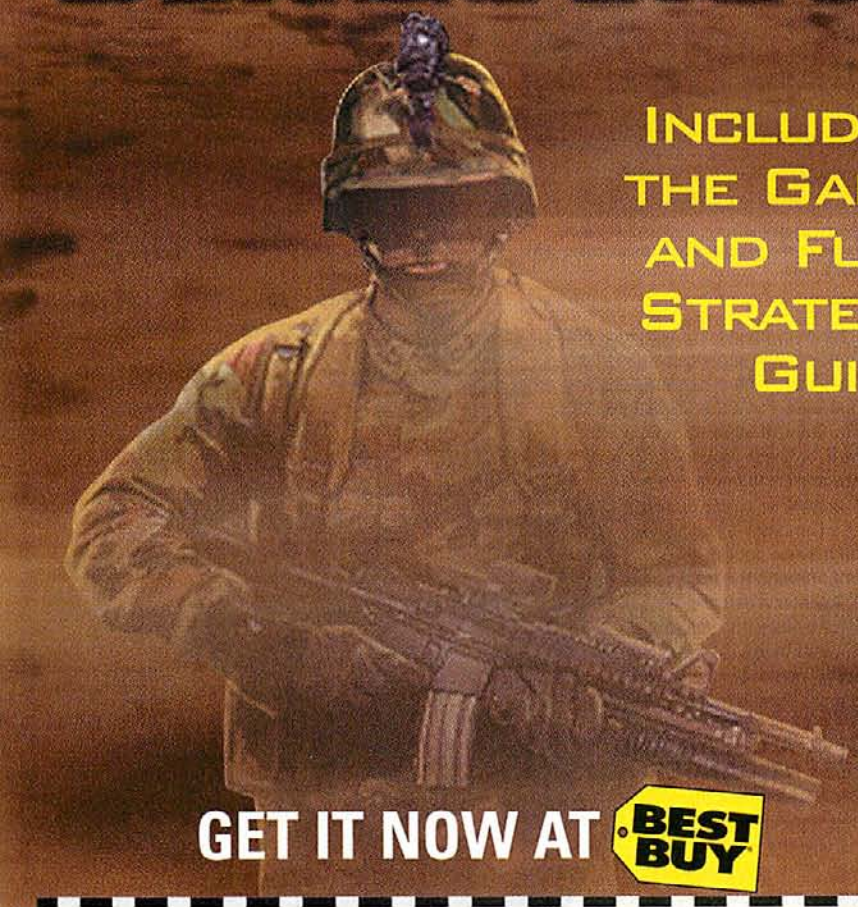
While his stash contains only two actual weapons, Fisher's arsenal is designed to silently incapacitate enemies or gather information to plan his next sneaky move. Whether he's using cameras that can map out an area, noisemakers that dispense tear gas, or a fiber-optic cable to peek through a door, Fisher has plenty of options besides

IGN Editors' Choice Awards ☆ GameSpot scores it at 8.4 (great) of 10 ☆ "Best of E3 2002,"

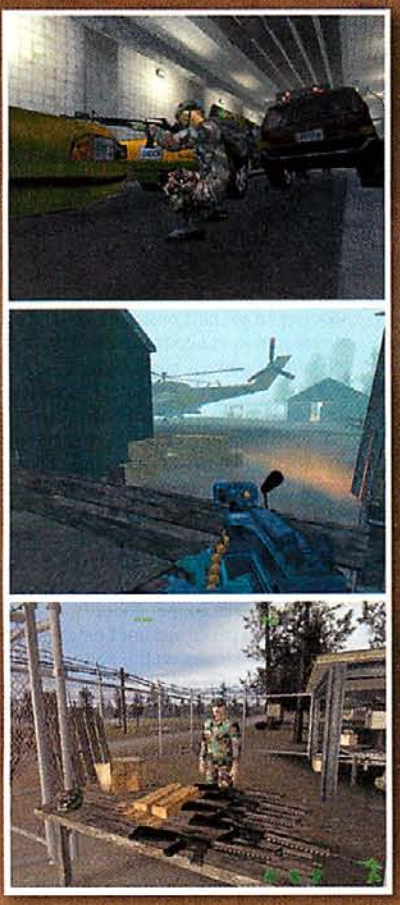
"The U.S. Army's new recruiting videogame is an online phenomenon"
—*Newsweek*

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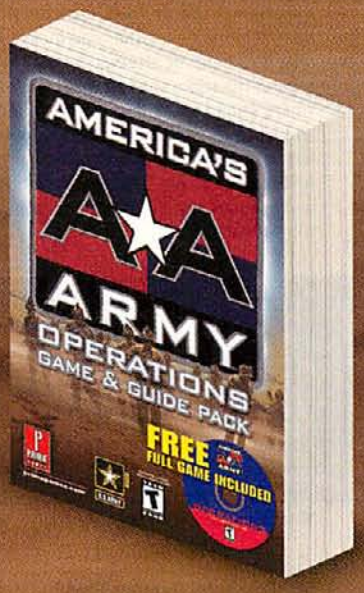
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PRIMA GAMES

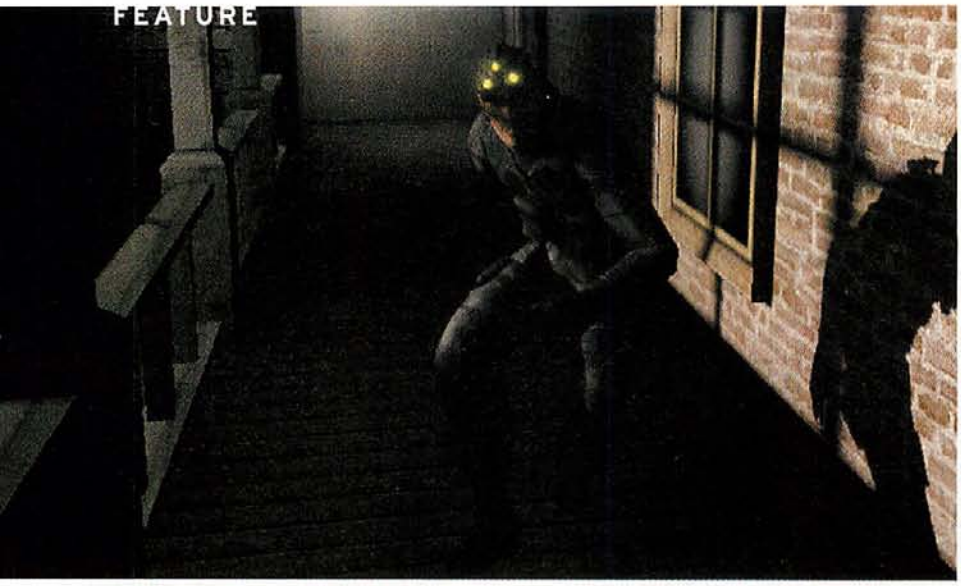
BEST BUY
Turn On the Fun

U.S.ARMY

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This game has received the following rating from the ESRB

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB



In the real world, people would notice the three dots from Sam's goggles against a completely dark backdrop, but they won't in the game. Why did the developers leave the goggles lit? Without these dots, you'd have no way of knowing where Sam is in a completely dark room.

shooting to get past obstacles. Ferland said a lot of research went into the gadgets; in fact, everything in the game is being either used in the field or tested in secret government labs somewhere. For weapons in particular, Ferland comments that decisions were based on "what a solo operative would need in a mission...[what would] be light and take minimal space, and make sense with the game concept and gameplay."

Along with the technotoys, Sam displays plenty of awesome physical moves. Besides requisite sneaking and crouching, he can bounce off walls, rappel, shoot from a hanging position, and perform a Jet Li-style split jump that has him straddling the walls of a narrow hallway to quickly hide above an approaching enemy. To take out guards, he can drop down on them, grab them, and use them as human shields, or simply knock them out with a swift punch.

ANONYMOUS GOONS AT HOME

The *SC* A.I. is smart enough to investigate oddities and call for backup. For example, an A.I. guard will notice if some lights are off and will attempt to turn them back on. If that doesn't work, he'll either call for backup, turn on a flashlight, or attempt to feel his way around the room with an outstretched hand. If you're stupid enough to knock someone out and leave the body in the open, another guard will probably revive the unconscious one. Additionally, if you take someone hostage and use him as a human shield, other guards will balk at shooting you.

SC has very open maps with multiple entry points and varying solutions. At the very beginning of one mission, for example, you can either climb into a nearby fan vent while it's temporarily shut off, or sneak around the guards and climb into a different vent. In another case, you can enter an embassy by going through a side door or walking through the front door. To enter a defense ministry building, do you rappel down to a window close to your objective, or slowly climb down via a more remote route?



LIGHT: A CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER

The PC development team started work in late summer. Thankfully, the transition from Xbox to PC mostly involved minimal hassles; stuff like gameplay, animation, and art remained the same. Instead, changes the team focused on for the PC version had to do with ensuring that the lighting stayed the same, and with making a PC-centric interface.

The best aspect of the Xbox version is the lighting, which legitimately compares to the great effects seen in the demos of *Doom III*. The *SC* lighting system had to be totally redone for



SECRET AGENT MAN

Former SAS sniper team commander Chris Ryan was the last member of Bravo Two Zero, a team secretly dropped behind enemy lines in Iraq. Now that he's crawled his way across the hostile dunes to safety and settled back into civilian life, Ubi Soft is about to publish *Splinter Cell*. *CGW* got some time with Ryan to pick his brain about this latest game.

Q: What do you think of the Red Storm titles as a whole?

A: They're very good as a general rule. Most of the games feature a nice range of scenarios and weaponry. The only downside is that there's so much to consider even before you begin a mission that it's a royal pain in the ass. But that's realism for you.

Q: How would you sum up *Splinter Cell* in one sentence?

A: A sexier version of *Metal Gear Solid* that involves cracking a lot of enemy heads.

Q: Why is the premise of the game so appealing to players of all stripes?

A: The James Bond element. It's suave and cool. There's no blasting right through...staying calm under pressure, thinking your way through situations is the challenge. Of course, the wide range of available ass-kicking equipment doesn't hurt either.

Q: Fancy it's somewhat realistic then?

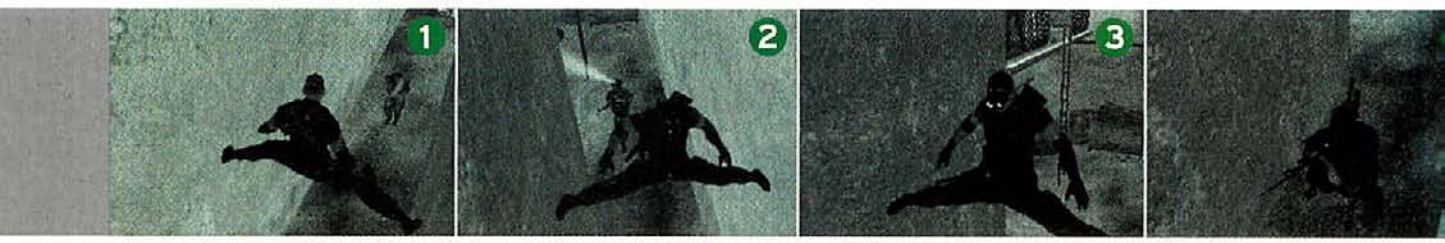
A: You've seen the split-leg concealment maneuver? Let me think of the last time I used that one...like, never.

Q: But surely you got a kick out of it?

A: Oh yeah. The broad range of maneuvers you can pull off is one of the most attractive features. Stealth is so important that they had to come up with all sorts of cool actions you can take.

Q: The most ringing endorsement that you can give it?

A: I know a few guys are waiting for it. And that's saying a lot. The last thing a veteran usually wants to do is see more action on the front lines.



With the split-jump, Sam can straddle the hallway up high while an unsuspecting dupe passes below. Time your jump right, and you can fall onto the thug, knocking him o

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Shoot out the lights on this chandelier, then switch to night vision and take out enemies while they feel around in the dark.

the PC version, using a combination of shadow buffers and projector systems in order to generate the natural lighting conditions in the game. The PC version was developed under the auspices of its own team; however, team members for the Xbox version came aboard to help polish the engine.

Hardware requirements currently aim for at least Xbox-level specs to get the full effect—that is, an 800MHz CPU and a GeForce2 would be enough to get some graphical goodies at a nice resolution. Those of us blessed with 2GHz CPUs or greater and GeForce FXs or Radeon 9700 Pros should be able to pop the game up in glorious 1600x1200 resolution. The only major hurdle left for the graphics team is supporting antialiasing, to correct all the jaggy lines found in the Xbox version.



Okay, *Splinter Cell* isn't all darkness and gloom. There's the occasional raging fire to spice things up.

CONTROLLED BADASSNESS

The biggest difference between the two versions is the control scheme. Rather than make a lazy port that requires PC gamers to buy a gamepad, the team specifically retuned the interface for mouse and keyboard. The basic interface-design principle is for camera and equipment controls to be handled by the mouse, with everything else to be controlled via the keyboard.

It's a pretty smooth setup; the WASD keys control Sam's movement, and the mouse fluidly controls the camera. Everything is remappable, but for the most part, the default keys for things like jump, inventory, back-to-wall, and interact work well as they are. The mouse swings the camera around, and the middle mouse button controls equips, left mouse controls fire, and right mouse controls alternate fire.

The mouse wheel plays the most interesting role. On Xbox, the left analog stick controls your speed; pushing it all the way forward makes Fisher sprint, while nudging it keeps him quiet and sneaky. The PC version will use the mouse wheel as a speed controller; scroll down to slow Fisher to a stealthy crawl, or scroll up to get him running. It's not a true analog control, but it provides the same varying degrees of speed, and because the setting stays put, you can dial

GADGETS

Sam doesn't have a whole lot of weapons handy, but he has a bunch of gadgets and ammo types to get him through his missions. Here's a sampling of the wonderful toys he can use in the field, many of which are designed for stealth gameplay.



STICKY SHOCKER

You can load this knockout gadget into your SC20K rifle and fire it off. It's basically a projectile-based taser; the sticky shocker will attach itself to the target and silently deliver an electric charge, instantly knocking the enemy out.



CAMERA JAMMER

This will be your best friend when sneaking around a base. Just aim this at a camera and squeeze the trigger; a progress bar will indicate whether or not the camera is jammed, and how much battery life is left in the jammer. It takes a couple minutes to recharge the jammer, so you can't just waltz around, jamming things right and left.



FIBER-OPTIC CAMERA

Sam uses his PDA for mission objectives, intelligence gathering, and yes, recon. Slide the cable itself underneath a doorway, and the PDA displays whatever the cable sees, in night-vision mode.



the mouse wheel all the way back and remain forever stealthy.

The biggest change control-wise is the lockpicking scheme. In the Xbox version, you rotate the left analog stick in a circle until your controller vibrates, and then keep the stick held down to pick the tumbler. The whole process of finding and picking the individual tumblers simulates the jiggling motion of picking a lock. For the PC version, you hold down various combinations of the WASD keys in order to find the right pair that will undo each tumbler.

At press time, the PC version is set to support a save-anywhere feature (as opposed to the checkpoint system used in the Xbox game), but the *SC* team wants to check the game balance before setting that in stone. Additionally, the team wants to make extra content (missions, gadgets, etc.) available, but as of press time, details are still being finalized.

To some degree, *Splinter Cell* seems similar to *Grand Theft Auto III*: It's a great port of a great game. Ferland says, "To hear that Hideo Kojima [director of *Metal Gear Solid 2*] was looking forward to the *Splinter Cell* release was an amazing compliment. I felt like Michael Jordan was complimenting me on my jump shot!" And after some hands-on time with the PC version, we're confident that PC gamers won't be forced to buy an Xbox in order to experience one of the best Clancy games that has ever been produced.



Id's John Carmack seems to have some competition in the lighting area. Check out this scene of Sam descending a staircase while bright light filters through a grating and projects a neat-looking shadow on the wall.

DISTRACTION CAMERA

The best gadget in the game. Fire it into a distant corner, and it acts like a remote camera. Next, have it make noise (like a bird chirping), and nearby enemies will be curious enough to check it out. When the victim gets close, the camera can spray tear gas to take him out instantly.



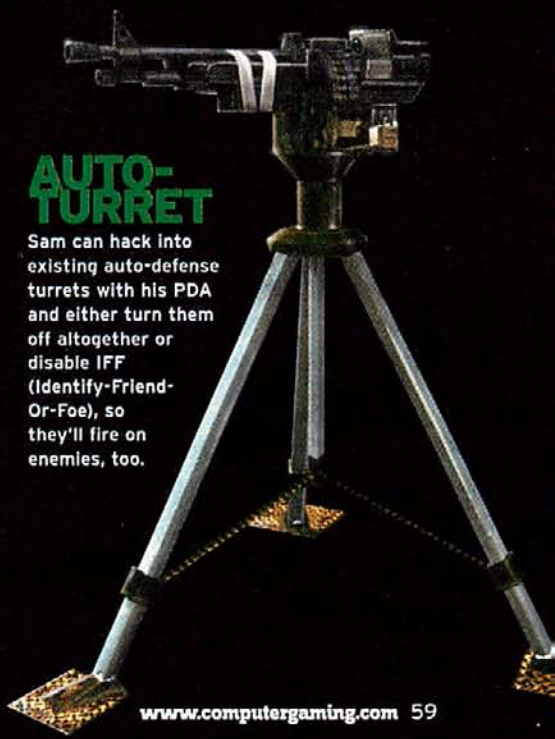


LASER MICROPHONE

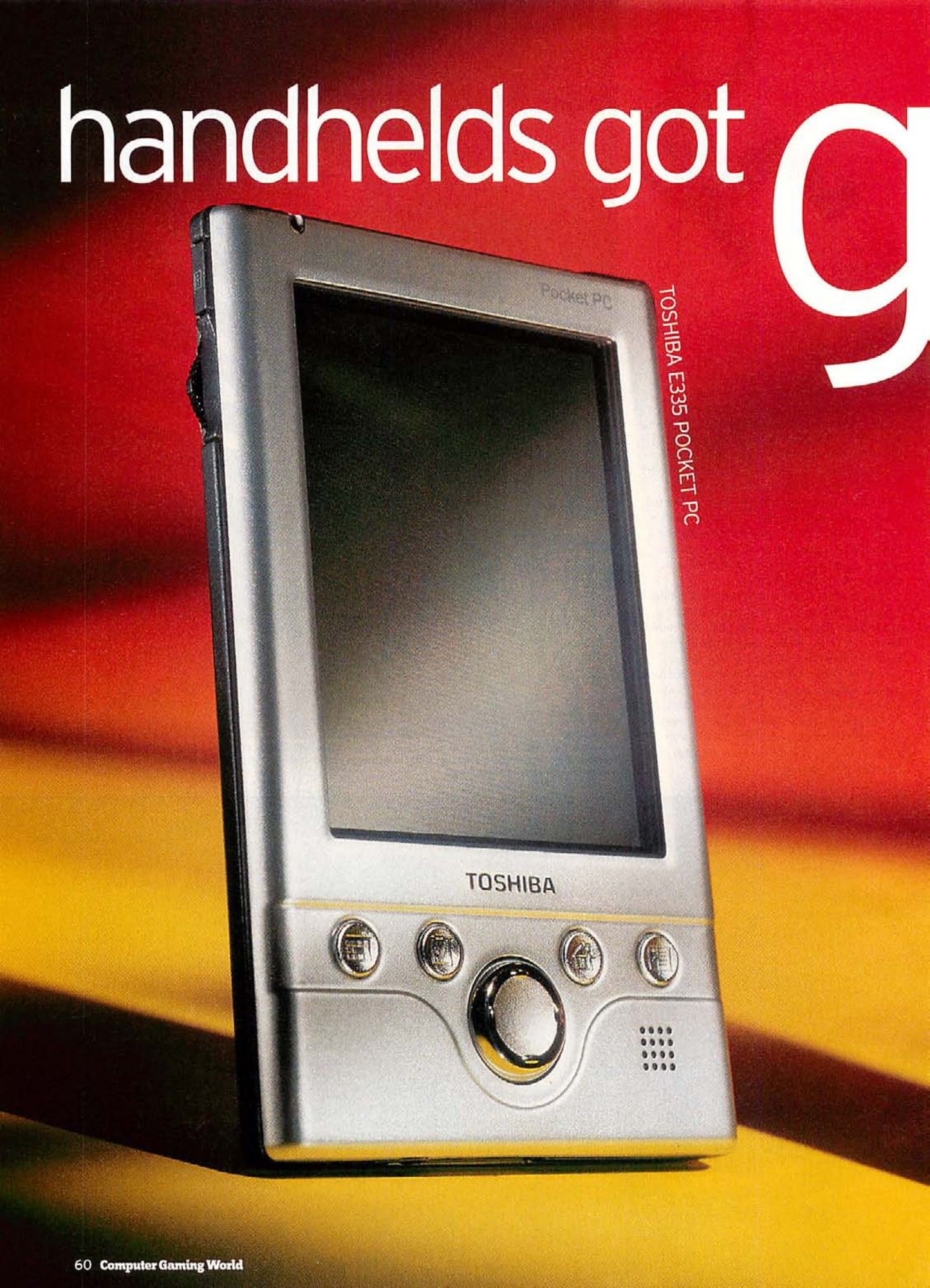
All cool spy people use this for eavesdropping—even Batman did at one point. Just point the laser at any window, and it will read the vibrations off the glass and convert them to speech. Nice way for Sam to get some intel before crashing through the window and cracking some heads.

AUTO-TURRET

Sam can hack into existing auto-defense turrets with his PDA and either turn them off altogether or disable IFF (Identify-Friend-Or-Foe), so they'll fire on enemies, too.



handhelds got g



TOSHIBA E335 POCKET PC

ame

BY DARREN GLADSTONE PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO



Quake in the palm of your hands

Put down that Game Boy Advance, Sparky. It might be nice for a couple rounds of *Street Fighter 2*, but it's a little hard to go stealth and play in the middle of a meeting (and believe us, we should know). Odds are, the Palm Pilot's inventors didn't have gaming in mind when working on their creation, but hey, that's what handhelds have become—unassuming business devices that get your life organized and, conveniently enough, support game playing.

Handhelds were originally just places to stash appointments and phone lists. Hundreds of companies armed their corporate drones with PDAs—and just as you once goofed off by playing *Solitaire* on the company desktop, so began the humble origins of handheld gaming. Today, there are hundreds of games for both the Palm OS and Pocket PC handhelds, and that number is steadily growing. As a result, hardware manufacturers are unleashing multimedia marvels that can play videos, MP3s, audiobooks, and—you guessed it—games. The real trick is figuring out which PDA is best for you.

rosy palms

While Palm handhelds have been around the longest, they've always had that simple-to-use, business-first focus, and it's shown in their games. Because they're tailor-made for the Palm's original pokey 16MHz processor, grayscale and text-based game titles have long been the mainstay of the device. Take the game *Dope Wars*, for example. This simple-yet-addictive game has you trading–ahem–commodities in New York City, and it remains one of the more popular Palm titles around, according to CNET's Downloads.com. If you can make do with minimalist titles, Palm addresses basic needs with the likes of the bargain-basement Zire model, which sells for less than a hundred bucks.

That isn't to say the platform hasn't grown–Palm OS 5 is now promising to place an emphasis on multimedia. Games for handhelds once fell flat graphically, with blips and bleeps on a 160x160 screen, but they're starting to get more sophisticated. Heck, Sega is now helping to provide the gaming API to supplement Palm's new OS.



But a game can only look as good as the device it's played on. PDAs now support better resolutions (320x320) and more colors (65,000), and also provide better audio support. Sony's CLIE line has been pushing the limits of what a Palm can do. In fact, the two newest poster children for Palm OS gaming are Sony's CLIE PEG-T665 ($400) and CLIE NX-70V ($600). The T665 is a good all-around machine, while the NX-70V is a gadget-lover's dream. Both are fantastic devices for playing games–and, in typical Sony fashion, they don't look half bad, either.

But there's still a general problem with Palm devices: the controls. A Game Boy Advance has a direction pad and a few action buttons to control moving and fighting. Palm handhelds have buttons for opening phone lists and calendars–hardly ideal when you want to play *Tony Hawk 3*. Sony, however, created a workaround, an optional gamepad attachment,

5 games you've gotta get: Palm OS



Pinballz A 3D-modeled pinball game (www.jasongoldman.com)



300 Bowl Bowling for Palms (www.jasongoldman.com)



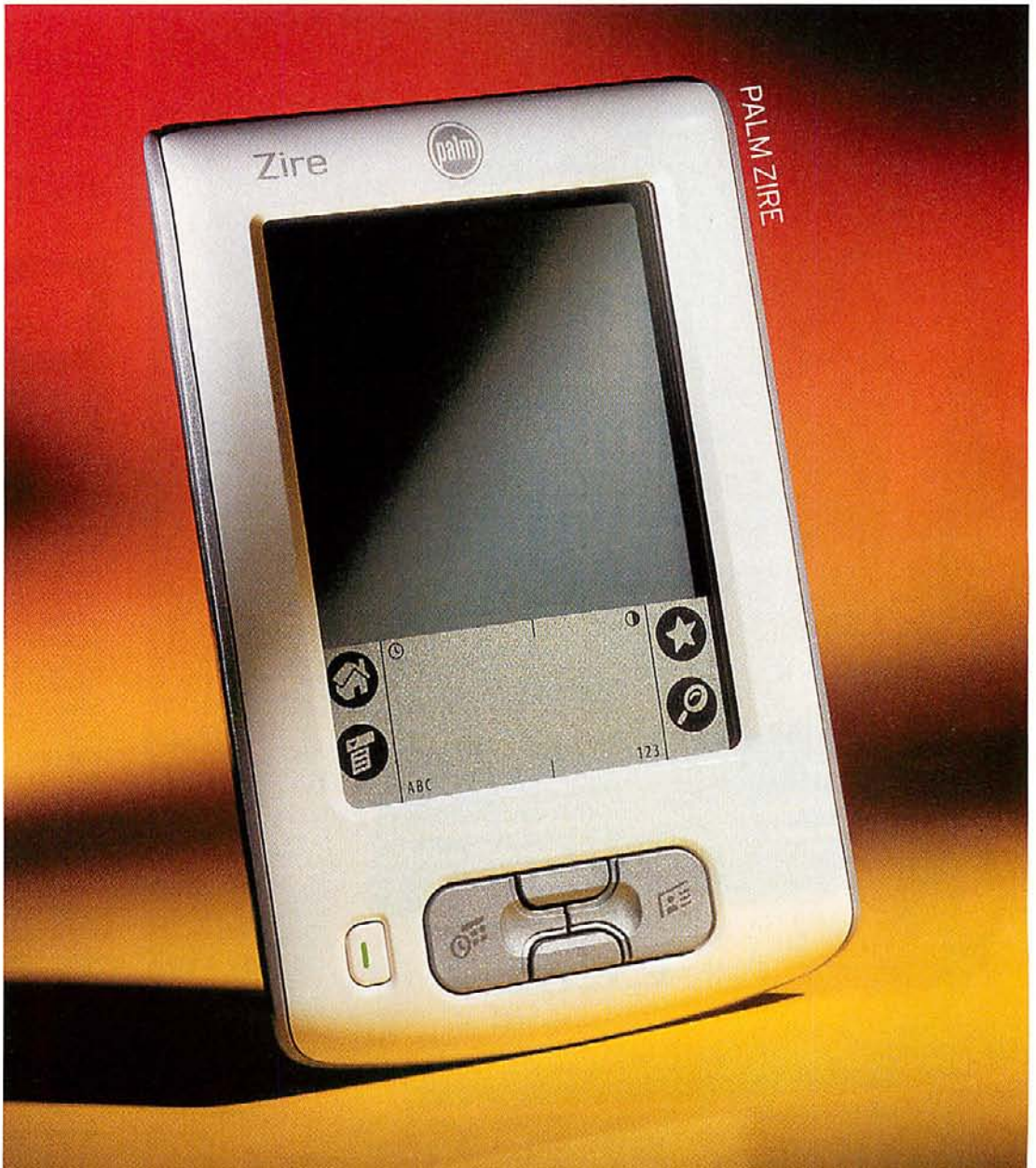
Serious Sam First-person action on a Palm? Get Serious (www.globalstarsoftware.com)



Ancient Red Get a taste of Diablo-style RPG fun (www.ancientred.com)



Zap 2000 Old-school shooting action (www.astraware.com)



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"...oh man are you in for a treat." - *IGN*

"...the game simply looks gorgeous and also plays very well to boot." - *HOMELAN*

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — VIOLENCE

POWERED BY gamespy

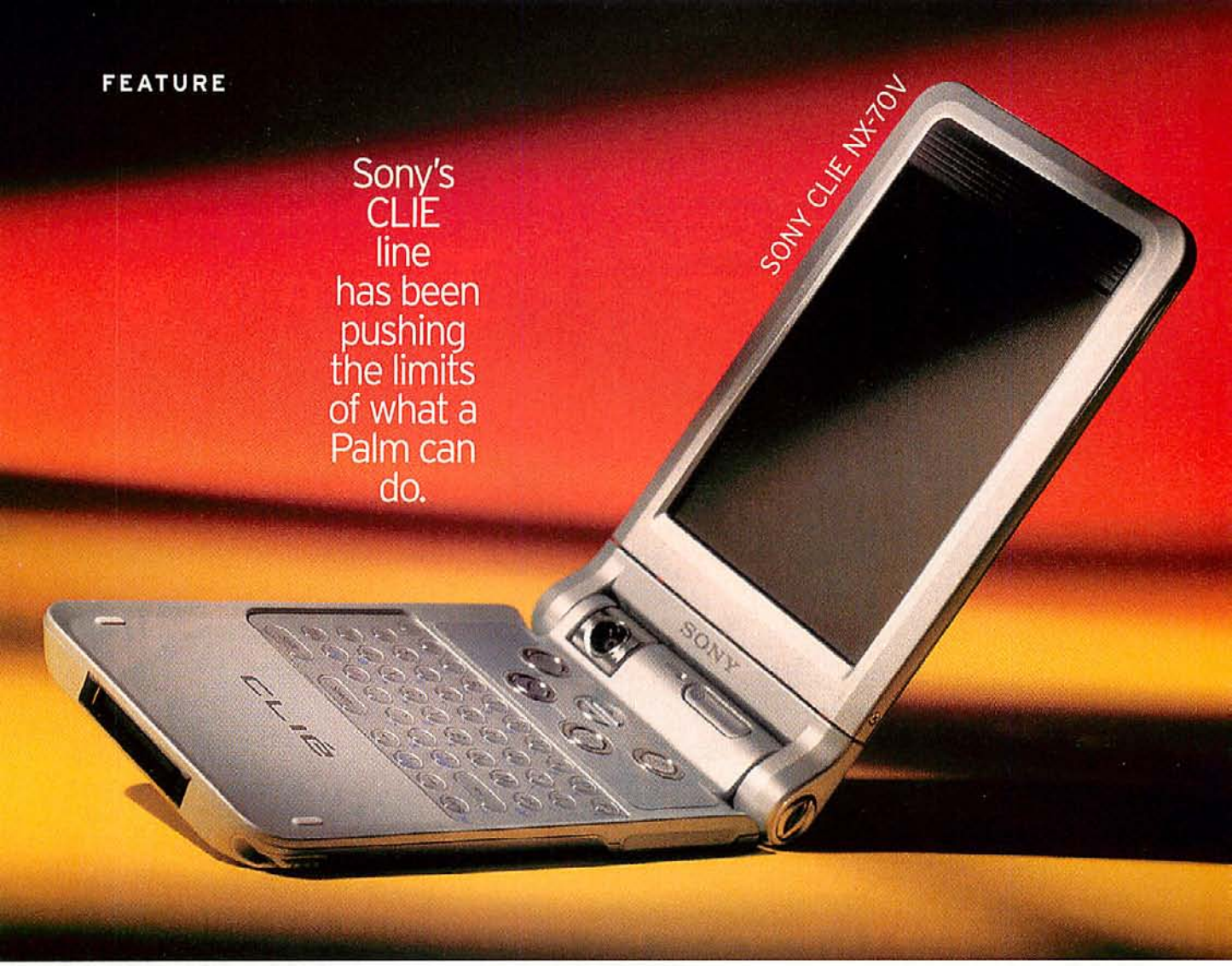
PC CD ROM

DIGITAL REALITY

wanadoo

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the CLIE PEGA-GC10. With it, you can turn a CLIE PDA into a GBA just by sliding on an overlay. The only other Palm PDA showing promise is the new Palm Tungsten ($500), which has a built-in thumbpad controller.

As it stands, there are a tremendous number of Palm owners, and that large audience is looking for new games all the time. Regardless of which Palm handheld you pick up, there are plenty of titles to choose from. Just don't expect to get blown away by the graphics.

a rocket in your pocket

While the Palm OS has always hung its hat on being basic and straightforward, Microsoft has positioned its handhelds as portable computers. (Big shocker with a name like Pocket PC, eh?) For years, Pocket PC devices have put an ever-growing emphasis on multimedia and gaming. Now, you'll start finding the power of an old Pentium II system in your hands.

Currently, all Pocket PC handhelds use Intel's 206MHz StrongARM processor. They work well enough, and perform like your trusty ol' PC. But newer models will start packing Intel's new XScale processors, which offer a whole lot more multimedia oomph. And while Palm OS 5 is only now concerning itself with graphics and sound, Pocket PCs have had crisp, colorful LCD screens and good audio for a few years already. Thankfully, it looks like someone talked to gamers before designing these new PDAs. Almost all Pocket PCs come with a built-in thumbpad and a bunch of launch buttons that can easily substitute for action buttons. As a result, more advanced games are taking advantage of the Pocket PC.

Need a few examples? How about a platform that not only plays MP3s and video clips, but also churns out PC-caliber games such as *Snails*, a well-done, colorful, handheld tribute to *Worms*? There are shooting games, driving games, and even a number of first-person shooters coming out. Developers are also working behind the scenes to create 3D engines for these handhelds. For a great example, check out a demo of Fathammer's X-Forge at www.fathammer.com.

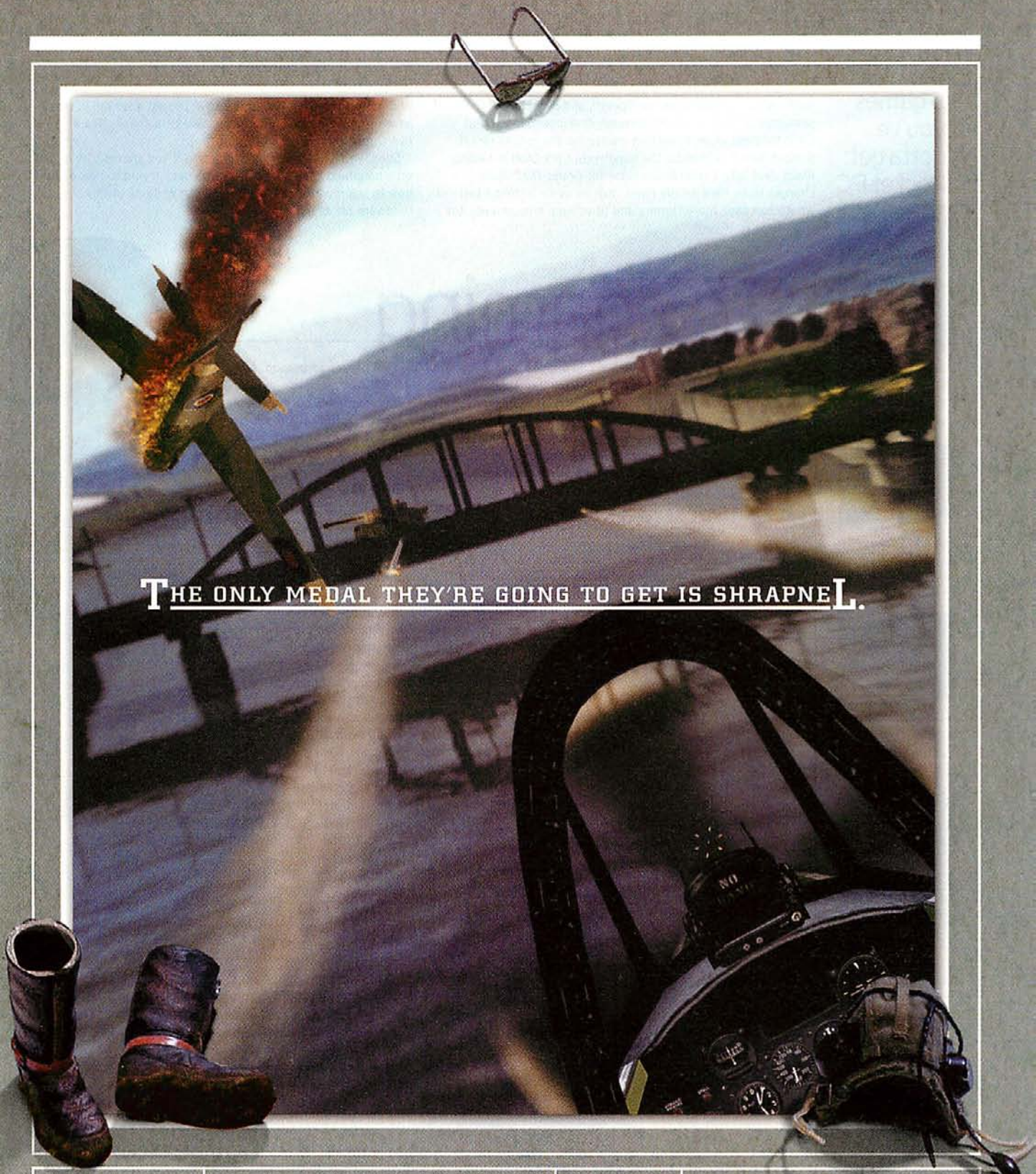
With so many Pocket PC handhelds available, it's easy to get confused. They all offer similar traits, but the main differences you'll find are in the form factors, the RAM, and the software bundle. These handhelds can vary, from the funky Toshiba e335 ($400) to the chunky Casio E-200, but the important part is what lies under the hood. As it stands, the most basic Pocket PC has at least 32MB of RAM available to split between system resources and files. (Attention gamers: Start setting money aside now for expansion cards, to make rooms for all those beefy, resource-intensive titles.) That's enough room for a couple of games, but if you really want to get the most out of a Pocket PC, you need a unit that's packing 64MB. Right now, there are no fewer than five different game-ready handhelds en route. Among them is Toshiba's e335, which has the new XScale processor and an appealing exterior. HP's iPaq, always a favorite with the corporate types, is also pushing its new model—the 5400, which promises horsepower and built-in wireless connectivity. And though details were sketchy at press time, it looks like Dell is also going to get into the mobile-devices game.

big game hunting

It's true that the first PDA games were slapped together by enthusiasts, but big business is now starting to get in on the action. Electronic Arts has probably been the most prolific, cranking out sports titles (*FIFA 2002, Tiger Woods PGA Tour*

Where to go online

Pocket PC games:
www.pocketmatrix.com
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5 games you've gotta get: Pocket PC



Argentum A rock-solid RTS game that's better than some PC titles (www.ionside.com)



Snails Turn-based gastrod gunfights, minus the saltshaker (ce.syntact.fi/snails)



Tomb Raider The original adventure, but portable (www.eidos.com)



SimCity 2000 Build your futuristic city—or destroy it (www.ziosoft.com)



Fade An old-school graphic adventure to solve before you get to work (www.fade-team.com)

Golf), action games (*Need for Speed*), and old-school simulations (*SimCity 2000*) through developer Ziosoft. But EA is far from alone in getting involved in the mobile racket. *Serious Sam* has shot up the handhelds, Lara Croft is raiding iPaqs, and Take 2 Interactive plans for *Grand Theft Auto* charges to be filed on the Palm. Just as we're getting a taste of what's to come, more rumors and titles keep cropping up. *Age of Empires*, *WarCraft II*, and *Quake II*—the list goes on. In fact, as we went to press, Sony Online gave us a sneak peek at *EverQuest* for the Pocket PC.

Soon, you'll no longer be wondering if you should play games on a handheld. Instead, you'll be too busy trying to figure out how to scam your company so you can write all of this hardware off as a business expense.

976-gaming

Over the past few years, cell phones have shipped with any number of stupid, uninteresting games: *Snake*, anyone? Realizing that the gaming market is exploding, providers like Sprint PCS and Verizon Wireless have started offering "real" games for your cell phone. Which begs the question: Just because you can play games on your cell phone, will you actually want to? For many people, the answer will likely be yes. After all, since you've always got a cell phone on hand, why not play a round of golf, work through a few levels of *Pac-Man*, or drive a few laps between calls?

To that end, Sega is bringing out mobile versions of *Super Monkey Ball* and *MotoGP*, and we've seen early betas of *Tony Hawk* on Verizon's JAMDAT phone. We also got our hands on the two phones leading the cell phone gaming charge: Motorola's T720 from Verizon Wireless and Samsung's SPH-A500 from Sprint PCS. Here's our take on this burgeoning trend.

in this corner...Verizon Wireless

The Motorola T720 is Verizon Wireless' answer to the Sprint PCS Vision phones; it's a silver flip-phone with a 4,096-color display. However, the Motorola's display isn't very bright, and the slow refresh rate results in a noticeable onscreen lag when playing games. The T720 is, in many ways, a color version of Motorola's awesome V60 series: It boasts changeable faceplates, a 500-name phone book, and, like the V60, mediocre battery life—we got only about two hours of talk time! Using Verizon's Get It Now service (similar to Sprint PCS' Vision service), you're able to download custom ring tones, screensavers, and JAMDAT games (which cost from $1 to $5) like EA Sports' *2002 FIFA World Cup* and *Tiger Woods*; Fox Sports' *Hit the Pros*; *JAMDAT Football*; and *Jeopardy*, to name a few. Because of the button and D-pad layout, it's generally easier to play games on the T720, but this preference may vary from person to person. Also, the JAMDAT games are simpler than many of those available for the Sprint phone, which makes them easier to play on this platform.



and in this corner...Sprint PCS

Samsung's $300 SPH-A500 was the first gaming-enabled phone to hit the market, so in many ways, it set the bar by which all others will be measured; we even recommended it in last month's Gift Guide. Weighing only about 3.5 ounces, it manages to sport one of the brightest displays we've ever seen on a cell phone: a 128x160 pixel TFT color LCD. Other amenities include wireless Web browsing and a pretty good battery life—for a color phone. However, our test came up a little shy of Samsung's claimed 150 minutes of talk time. That said, what makes this phone stand out (beyond that awesome display) is the list of fun things you can do with it. We've downloaded and played mobile versions of *Tetris*, *MotoGP*, *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man*, and *Super Monkey Ball* ($5 each); and we've learned that some games are better suited for play on a tiny screen with little buttons than others. *Tetris*, *Super Monkey Ball*, and *MotoGP* are addictive, while the phone's small screen and buttons made games like *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders* more difficult than fun. The downloadable ring tones ($1 each) are fun, too; we love watching heads turn when the *Knight Rider* theme signals an incoming call.



it's a split decision!

Ultimately, choosing one of these phones over the other will have more to do with which service—Verizon or Sprint PCS—you currently use than with the phone itself. Verizon users would probably enjoy the T720; the same is true for Sprint PCS customers and the A500. However, if you're currently using a different provider, you may want to get some hands-on experience before taking the leap.

—William O'Neal

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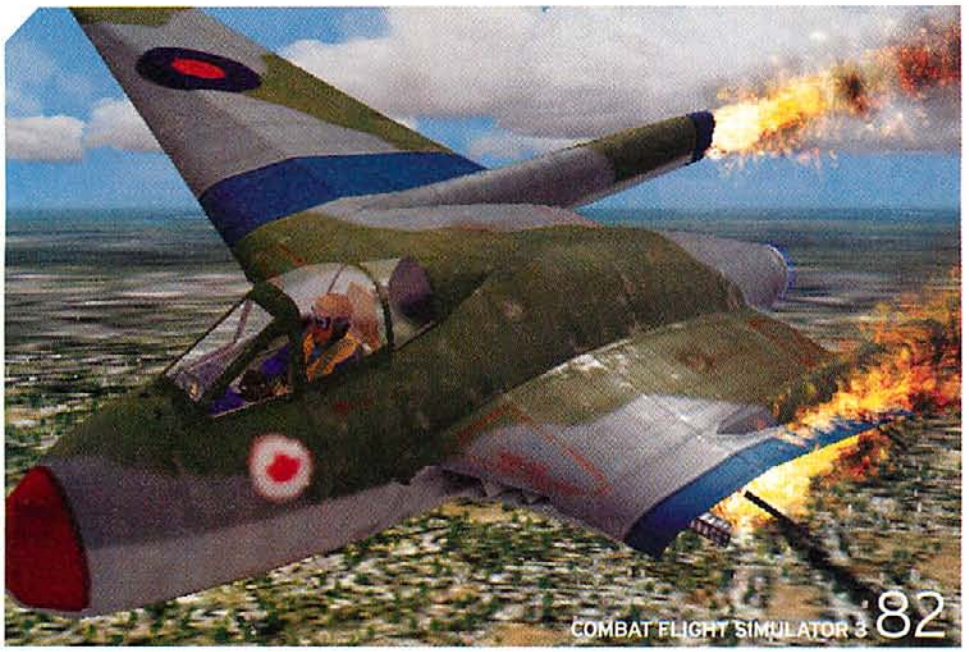


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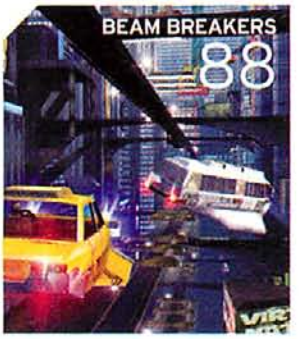
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Reviews

We love games, we hate games Edited by Robert Coffey

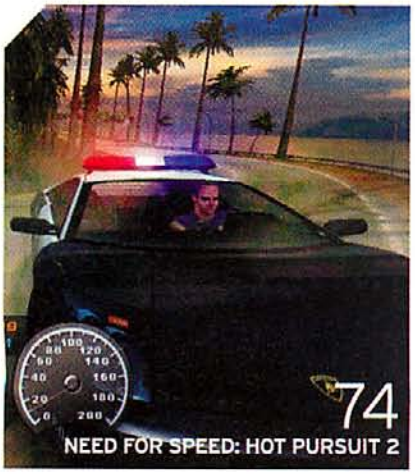


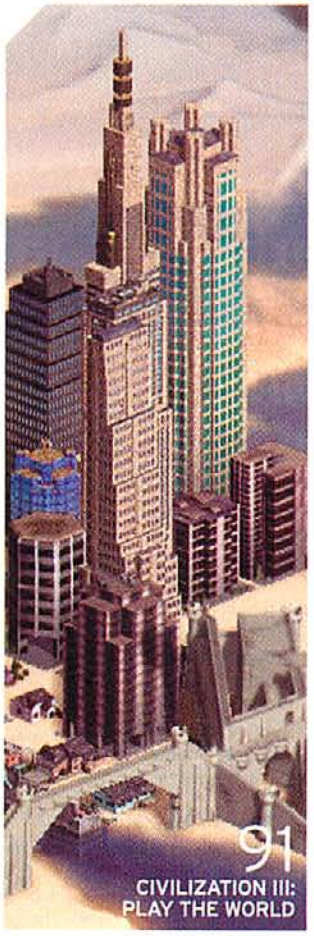




If imitation is the greatest form of flattery, then *Earth & Beyond* borders on an unhealthy obsession.

EARTH & BEYOND 72







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Weather effects and details like swaying trees and rustling leaves add a lot to the game's atmosphere.

Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin

Your ticket to the Russian front, comrade! BY BRUCE GERYK

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: BATTLEFRONT.COM
DEVELOPER: BATTLEFRONT.COM
GENRE: TACTICAL WARGAME
ESRB RATING: NOT RATED
PRICE: $52 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500, 64MB RAM, 1.2GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 800, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2 PLAYERS)

If you played the original, *Combat Mission: Barbarossa to Berlin* won't shock you with its elegance like its predecessor did. Then again, it would be hard to top the effect *Combat Mission* had in 2000. Despite being available only online through Battlefront.com, the game sold beyond all expectations, and a follow-up was never in doubt. Two years later, the sequel is a face-lift, update, and expansion all in one. It's also still the best wargame out there.

This time, the setting is the war in Russia, and the game is no less comprehensive than its predecessor in depicting weapons, vehicles, and soldiers from all the combatants, including Finland and the minor Axis nations. Battles range from the early days of Barbarossa to the last stand in Vienna, and all the famous (and obscure) places in between. There is so much here, the game can be overwhelming.

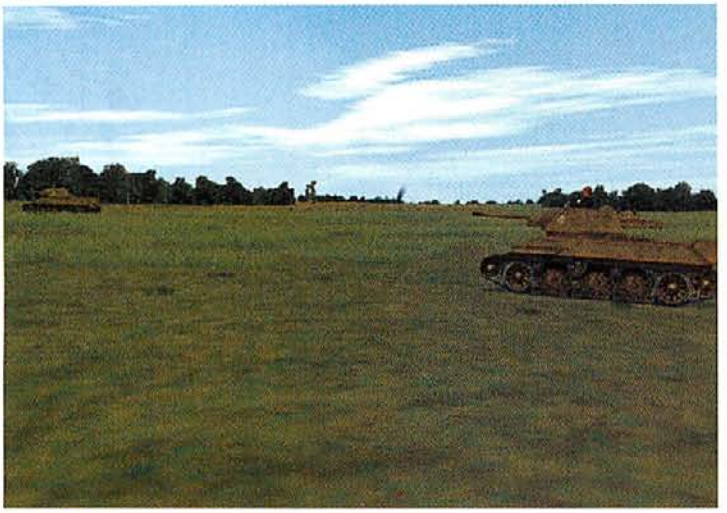
Elegance defines the game system, and it remains as beguiling as ever. Its genius is that it keeps control-freak wargamers happy, letting them issue detailed orders to their units at each turn in a planning phase, and then transforming these orders into a 60-second war movie that is as gripping as any real-time game.



The engine works best when depicting mixed-force or pure armor actions.

Playing a movie

Good movies tell stories, and chances are that your games will have their share of them, whether it's the machine gunner who holds out in a building despite being rushed by waves of enemies, or the plucky squad that crosses 50 yards of open ground while under fire. As a veteran tank crew racks up the kills, you'll start looking for them each turn, cheering every shot they take and



Giant tank battles like Kursk are now on the menu.



Russian human-wave attacks are modeled, complete with authentic voices shouting, "Urrah!"

wincing as shells ricochet off their tank's hull armor. You can replay these movies from multiple angles, watch different parts of the battlefield, and enjoy the game's improved graphics, from the terrain to the unit models. You can also watch the lead fly as you pray your troops can hold that building for just one more turn. You get even more attached to your units when you play through one of the many multibattle operations in which you lead a force through linked scenarios and redeploy in between. Your veteran Tiger crew becomes much more valuable when you know you'll need it in the future. It's even possible to salvage lightly damaged tanks.

Exciting as it is, the game makes no concessions when it comes to realism. The detailed armor-piercing algorithms of the original have been tweaked further, rules have been added to reflect Russian command constraints, and other refinements appear, such as the modeling of six different types of German gunnery optics. If it's not in the game, it probably never happened.

Minor disappointments

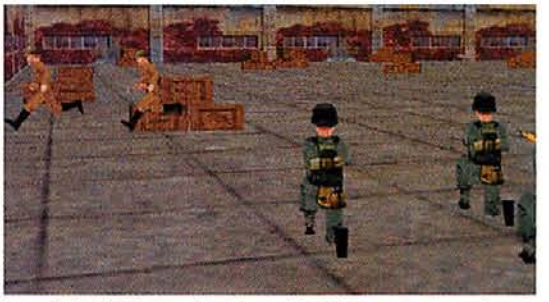
With all the things Battlefront changed under the hood, it's disappointing it didn't take care of some of the game's exterior flaws, like the lack of a unit manifest to make it easier to keep track of your army. The real-time A.I. still makes some odd choices (watch out for traffic jams), and the planning A.I. won't be mistaken for a skilled player. If it's skilled opposition you want, though, it's hard to beat *Combat Mission* as a multiplayer game, and the huge online community offers plenty of opponents, whether for direct Internet play or via the almost cheat-proof e-mail system.

With a superb game system, unrivaled detail, great graphics for the genre, and outstanding multiplayer, *CMBB* is more than enough to please any wargamer. Its 260-page manual will make raw recruits think like military men. Plus, with the dedicated fan base that cranks out tons of mods, it should keep grognards happily pushing Panzers for a long time.



New building and rubble textures update the game's look.

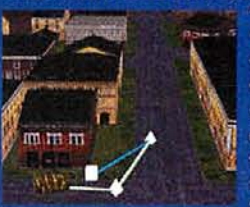
It's still the best wargame out there, period.



Large indoor battles are hard to model, but the game does a decent job with the set of Dzerzhinsky Tractor Works.

NEW ORDERS

The fact that *CMBB* resolves turns in 60-second chunks means that for those 60 seconds, you have to give up some control of your units to the game's tactical A.I. when the turn brings something unexpected (as most of them usually do). This version introduces several new orders, including "move to contact" and "shoot and scoot." The former is a good way to tell the TacA.I. that you'd rather have your units react to enemy fire than press on to the final waypoint you set. The latter lets tanks pop up from concealment to deliver a shot, and then quickly scoot to cover before the enemy can react.



This StuG III is facing several Lend-Lease Shermans. It can't stand up to three, but it should be able to fire on one before they can switch targets. This is a good time for the shoot-and-scoot order.

VERDICT ★★★★½

It isn't the perfect wargame, but it's the closest thing we have to it.



Combat is as pretty as it is boring.

Earth & Beyond

A zero-gravity leveling treadmill **BY ARCADIAN DEL SOL**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS** DEVELOPER: **WESTWOOD STUDIOS** GENRE: **MMORPG** ESRB RATING: **TEEN; BLOOD AND VIOLENCE** PRICE: **$29.99, $12.99 MONTHLY AFTER FIRST 30 DAYS** REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM, 2GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, INTERNET CONNECTION OF 56K OR FASTER** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **NONE** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER**

EverQuest brought online gaming to the masses and the masses to online gaming, breaking every subscription record to date. Developers want the bazillions of dollars that come with this success, but are wary of the financial risks of innovation, so they tend to find comfort in a successful formula. Hence, most every online game to follow *EQ* has been some sort of imitation. Westwood Studios' first MMORPG is set light-years away from Norrath, but if imitation is the greatest form of flattery, then *Earth & Beyond* borders on an unhealthy obsession.

We have launch

Earth & Beyond does offer some new features to veteran online gamers. The level of hand-holding in the tutorial is beyond anything seen before in computer gaming. From the moment you launch, each daunting decision you must make is carefully explained by the velvety-smooth voice of Megan, your personal animated avatar of assistance. Megan will have you playing like an expert within minutes, making camera-angle adjustments and managing ship resources. This is the tutorial by which all other computer games should be measured, and developers would be well served to construct their own Megan, whose dialogue is every bit as good as the NPCs within the game—and believe you me, that is high praise.

As is customary with this type of game, your greatest source of experience will come from quests assigned by the various characters you encounter. It is here that *Earth & Beyond* truly shines. Its universe is thick with the most interesting and engaging characters ever programmed. Their quests are not simply a means to an end; they are the chapter and verse in a highly entertaining story. Each character is more than the sum of its dialogue, which for most is seemingly endless. If you enjoy online games for the quests, *Earth & Beyond* will not disappoint.

Not all the innovations in *Earth & Beyond* are as masterfully implemented, though. There are three basic types of characters: hunters, explorers, and traders. As a hunter, you earn combat

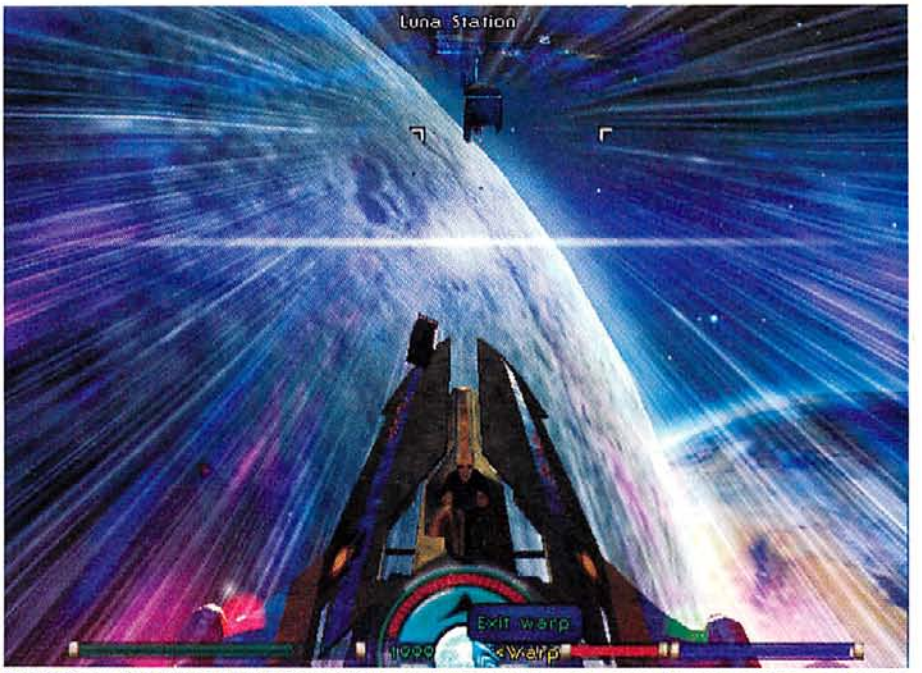
If imitation is the greatest form of flattery, then *Earth & Beyond* borders on an unhealthy obsession.



Shopping is practically your only opportunity to mingle with other players, yet everybody is too busy shopping to care.



There's a lot of various physical options for your characters, but why? You'll never see them again, and most players will encounter you while you're in your spaceship.



Over half your time playing *Earth & Beyond* will be spent watching this screen as you hyperspace between nav points.



While you can fly by and visit various planets, you cannot get out of your ship and explore them on foot. *Earth & Beyond* is a very ship-centric game.



Character experience accumulated along three primary play-styles sounds a lot better than it plays.

experience by killing things, naturally. As an explorer, you gain exploration experience by taking long drives around the dark side of Jupiter, for example. As a trader, you earn trade experience by collecting loot from combat or by mining asteroids for precious minerals—all to be sold at the nearest starbase. Each method of play tabulates experience independently.

The problem is that the hunters and the traders are explorers by necessity, and all players become traders as the increasing need for credits puts dents in your wallet. All classes present you with an array of skills that require frequent advancement in all three subdivisions. Despite your personal preference for one class, you are required to be all three players at once, making the concept of subdivided experience pointless. And if you think that's pointless, wait until you've done some fighting.

Star bores

Combat in *Earth & Beyond* is exactly like combat in *EverQuest*. You approach a mob, dig in, and fight until one of you dies. While this may work fine with swords and sorcery, the whole point of having a rocket ship is to actually rocket around while fighting. Unfortunately, this is no *Wing Commander*. Instead, you shift your engines into park and fire missiles until you either win or retreat. This could have been a *Wing Commander*, but that would require the courage to step away from the *EverQuest* formula.

Not all of *Earth & Beyond*'s shortcomings are the fault of the game itself. Space, by definition, is an empty void. In its effort to re-create this vacuum, *Earth & Beyond* succeeds...a little too well. Places of interest are separated by stretches of empty space with a redundant serving of navigation points, which, despite being in outer space, all seem to have been built at the same time. The visual treat that is the hyperdrive effect becomes painfully boring by the time you've crossed your hundredth navigation marker. If the solution is to populate the empty space with various objects, then you lose the silent solitude of space travel, which calls into question the concept of an *EverQuest*-style game in outer space to begin with.

Is *Earth & Beyond* fun? The answer is both yes and no, depending on your particular opinion of *EverQuest*. If you've burned yourself out on *EQ*'s leveling-treadmill model, *Earth & Beyond* will do nothing for you. On the other hand, if you're an avid *EQ* player seeking a new addiction, then *Earth & Beyond* will be every bit as engaging.

VERDICT ★★★★½

EverQuest in space, for better or for worse.

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2

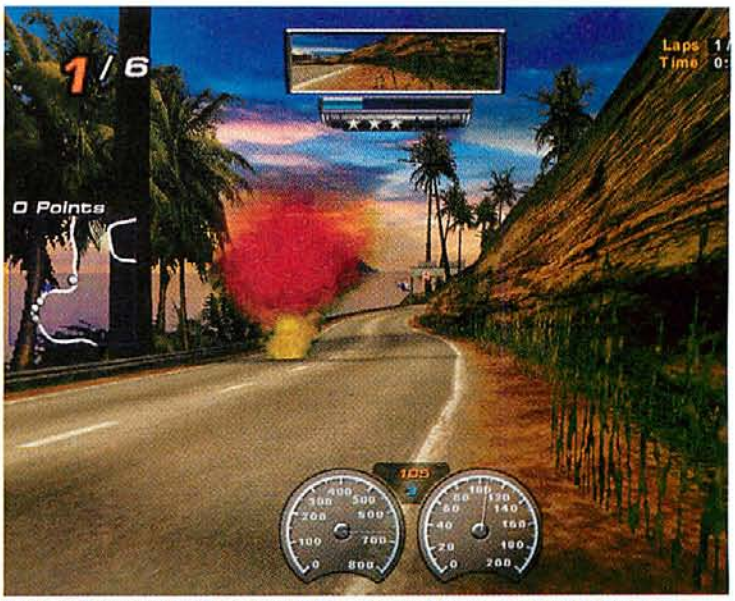
Zoom zoom BY WADE HERMES

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EA GAMES
DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
GENRE: RACING ESRB RATING: EVERYONE PRICE: $39.95
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 450, 128MB RAM, 1.2GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 800, 32MB 3D CARD MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: INTERNET, LAN (2-8 PLAYERS)

If you played the first game, you already know the drill in *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2*: You outrun the law with a stable of licensed exotic cars—including Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Porsches, and McLarens—that most of us can only dream about driving. Little has changed, and that's good—it means *Hot Pursuit 2* is still a high-speed blast of fender-bending fun.

Driving these exotic cars at speeds in excess of 150 mph is a gearhead's dream come true, and with upgraded graphics and gameplay enhancements, this game is a great arcade-racing experience. Cops are more aggressive and possess more tools to help them do their job. Now, they can call for backup and coordinate a roadblock or placement of spike strips. If these fail to stop you, they'll call for air support, which consists of a helicopter flying in and dropping barrel-sized Molotov cocktails on the road. Terribly realistic? Not even close. But dodging plummeting fireballs at extremely high speeds is a blast, so shut up.



King-size Molotov cocktails are part of the new arsenal the cops can use on the more difficult offenders.

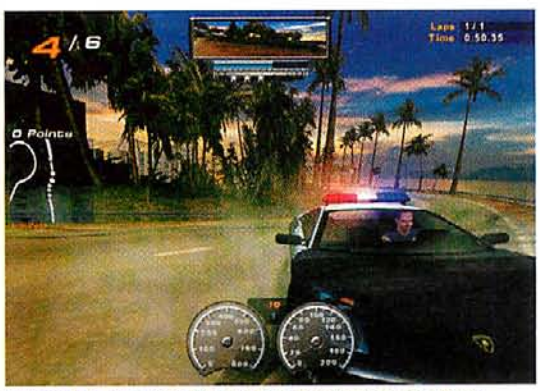
Dodging plummeting fireballs at extremely high speeds is a blast, so shut up.

You can play the game in either Single Challenge or Career mode—and the results are mixed. The Single Challenge mode is outstanding. You simply select the type of car, race course, and difficulty level, and you're on your way. I pumped the difficulty up to advanced, picked my favorite cars, and tore through one gorgeously rendered racecourse after another, breaking a sweat as I dodged Molotov cocktails, oncoming traffic, and other competitors—all while trying not to get busted by the cops. Everything here adds up to a racing experience that lives up to the *NFS* legacy.

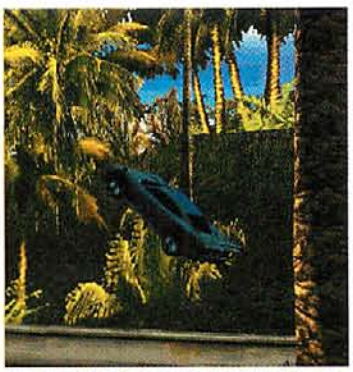
Unfortunately, the game's Career modes (Championship and Hot Pursuit) are simply unsatisfying and boring. They consist of a progression model for winning a gold, silver, or bronze medal, with the difficulty increasing as you go. A.I. cars in both Career modes are weak and slow, and they lack options for players to adjust their skills for a stiffer challenge. Even the cops, with their more aggressive driving skills, had a tough time keeping up when I drove the higher-priced cars, and, as a result, I was practically handed a gold medal in nearly all of the scenarios. The only real point of playing the Career mode is to unlock the cooler cars and tracks for racing in the far more satisfying Single Challenge mode.



Zipping along at 200 mph, I was unable to avoid this firebomb. Fortunately, *NFS: HP2* has no damage model to speak of, so I could continue.



Tweaked A.I. lets the cops make their quota using some very aggressive tactics.



At extremely high speeds, getting airborne is quite common. Some landing gear may have helped here.

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2 may not break new ground, but it's still one of the best high-octane racing experiences around, and the better graphics and tougher cop A.I. are great improvements to a sweet game. Too bad the lame Career modes can't match the rest of the game's quality.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

The disappointing Career modes just pour a little too much sugar in the gas tank.

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RATING PENDING

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ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY
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FIFA Soccer 2003

Looks great, plays dumb **BY JEFF LACKEY**

GAME STATS

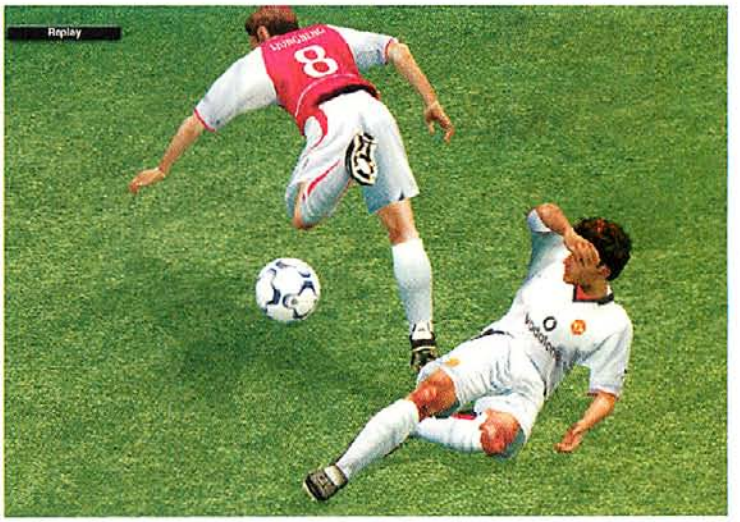
PUBLISHER: **EA SPORTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA SPORTS CANADA** GENRE: **SOCCER**
ESRB RATING: **EVERYONE**
PRICE: **$39.95**
REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM II 300, 64MB RAM, 680MB HARD DRIVE SPACE**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM II 750, 128MB RAM, 1.2GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, INTERNET (2-16 PLAYERS), HOTSEAT (2-4 PLAYERS)**

FIFA 2003 is a few brain cells short of being a superb game. It gets so much right that you want to overlook its IQ deficiency, and for many gamers—maybe most gamers—the great looks will be more than enough to compensate for what it lacks in player A.I. For real soccer aficionados, however, *FIFA 2003* is just good enough to be a frustrating tease.

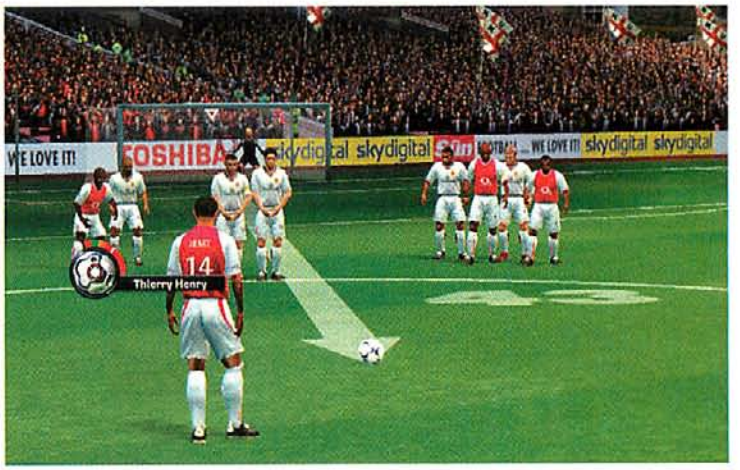
FIFA 2003 is unsurpassed in graphics, sound, and its ability to capture the atmosphere of world-class soccer. You can manage any of 450 clubs from around the world, and the animation and lighting effects of the stadiums, crowds, and players are incredible. The fans' chants, songs, cheers, and whistles create a wonderful you-are-there feeling. And John Motson's announcing is the best in computer sports (and not just because most PC sports commentary sucks). All these elements create an unbeatable package for presentation.

The past few versions of the franchise have been rightly criticized for exhibiting arcade-style gameplay: The ball stuck to the dribbler, and passes were always laser-beam accurate—gross inaccuracies that completely changed the way the game played. *FIFA 2003* finally rectifies that problem. Now, the ball can realistically slip away from the ball handler, the player can choose to dribble the ball away from himself, and passes can go astray. Those changes may sound minor, but the result is a game that plays much more like its real-life counterpart.

Cutting-edge graphics and sound,

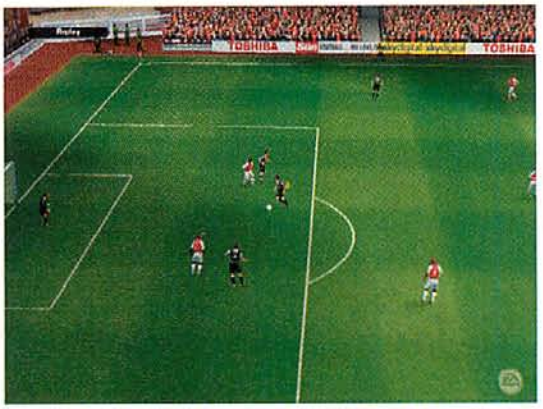


Arsenal's Ljungberg takes a hard foul.



Free kicks are now controlled with a golf sim-like power meter.

Why isn't this a perfect 5-star game?



Defenders standing around while the offense strikes is an all-too-common occurrence.

superb commentary, and a fundamental change to the gameplay engine that significantly improves the realism-why isn't this a perfect 5-star game? For a few reasons, the first of which may not matter to those who don't follow real-world soccer: Real names are used on the rosters, but many players' skill ratings are a far cry from those of their real-world counterparts. Some are far too high, while others are so unrealistically low, you'll be tempted to think the designers have a personal beef with the player. And many onfield strategy options present in previous versions are now absent.

But it's the dim-witted defensive A.I. that's the real killer. Players often aimlessly wander the field. Defensive players appear to have strict scripts that require the ball to be in a certain location before they take action. Forwards benefit from copious scoring chances as defenders brainlessly attend to other matters.

FIFA 2003 is an impressive game; its eye and ear candy are unsurpassed in sports gaming. It does so much right that the poor defensive A.I. is much more of a disappointment than it would be in a lesser game. Your enjoyment will be a matter of whether the incredible presentation outweighs this deficiency.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

If the A.I. were as sharp as the graphics, this would be a fantastic game.



EverQuest: The Planes of Power

Just one more hit, I swear BY JEFF GREEN

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
DEVELOPER: SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE: MMORPG
ESRB RATING: TEEN; VIOLENCE
PRICE: $29.99; $9.95 PER MONTH
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 400, 356MB RAM, 450MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD, INTERNET CONNECTION
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III, 512MB RAM, 1.5GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD, 56.6K OR FASTER INTERNET CONNECTION
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: DUH

The year 2002 will go down as the year that the cutting-edge developers of *EverQuest* finally discovered the compass. OK, that sounds snide, but as a former *EQ* addict with hundreds of hours logged in, I say it with love. Seriously, the game is three years old now, and Sony Online could really just kick back and collect monthly fees from the 400,000-plus addicts without doing any more work. So I credit the developers for being smart enough to keep *EQ*'s loyal fanbase happy and well fed with new content and gameplay and interface tweaks.

The newest expansion pack, *The Planes of Power* (which includes the full version of the game), is aimed primarily at the highest-level players, with 19 new zones, all but one that require you to be at least Level 46. That 19th new zone, however, is available to all players, and is so significant that it may actually help suck lapsed players back in—it sure did with me. The Plane of Knowledge is a hub from which you can now easily teleport to locations all over Norrath and Luclin, thus significantly reducing the horrendously-long travel times that have always been such a drag in *EQ*. In three weeks, I saw more of Norrath than I did in three years. I was also pleasantly surprised with the largely revamped interface, now with transparent, customizable windows and, yes, a freakin' compass at last.

The new stuff is great for newbies and lower-level players, but *Planes of Power* is really a gift for veteran players, like the earlier *Scars of Velious* expansion was. The level cap has been raised to 65, raids are now easier to organize, and the new upper-level zones are gigantic and challenging, with a central story line linking them all together. The story line has an organized, almost linear structure to it in which new, tougher planar zones open up as you complete certain tasks. How tough are the new zones? As of this writing, a month after launch, not one player had yet made it into the final zones. So veterans need not worry about returning to Earth any time soon.

The bigger question is whether those who've never cared before should try *EverQuest* now, because, clearly, the clock is ticking. *Planes of Power* offers the most accessible, best-looking *EverQuest* yet, but it's still getting awfully dated, both in looks and gameplay mechanics. With a number of next-generation MMORPGs out or on the way—including *Asheron's Call 2*, *World of WarCraft*, *Star Wars Galaxies*, and, yes, *EverQuest 2*—this might be an expansion that's best left to the already addicted.

VERDICT ★★★½☆
If you're still playing *EQ*, you might as well get it.



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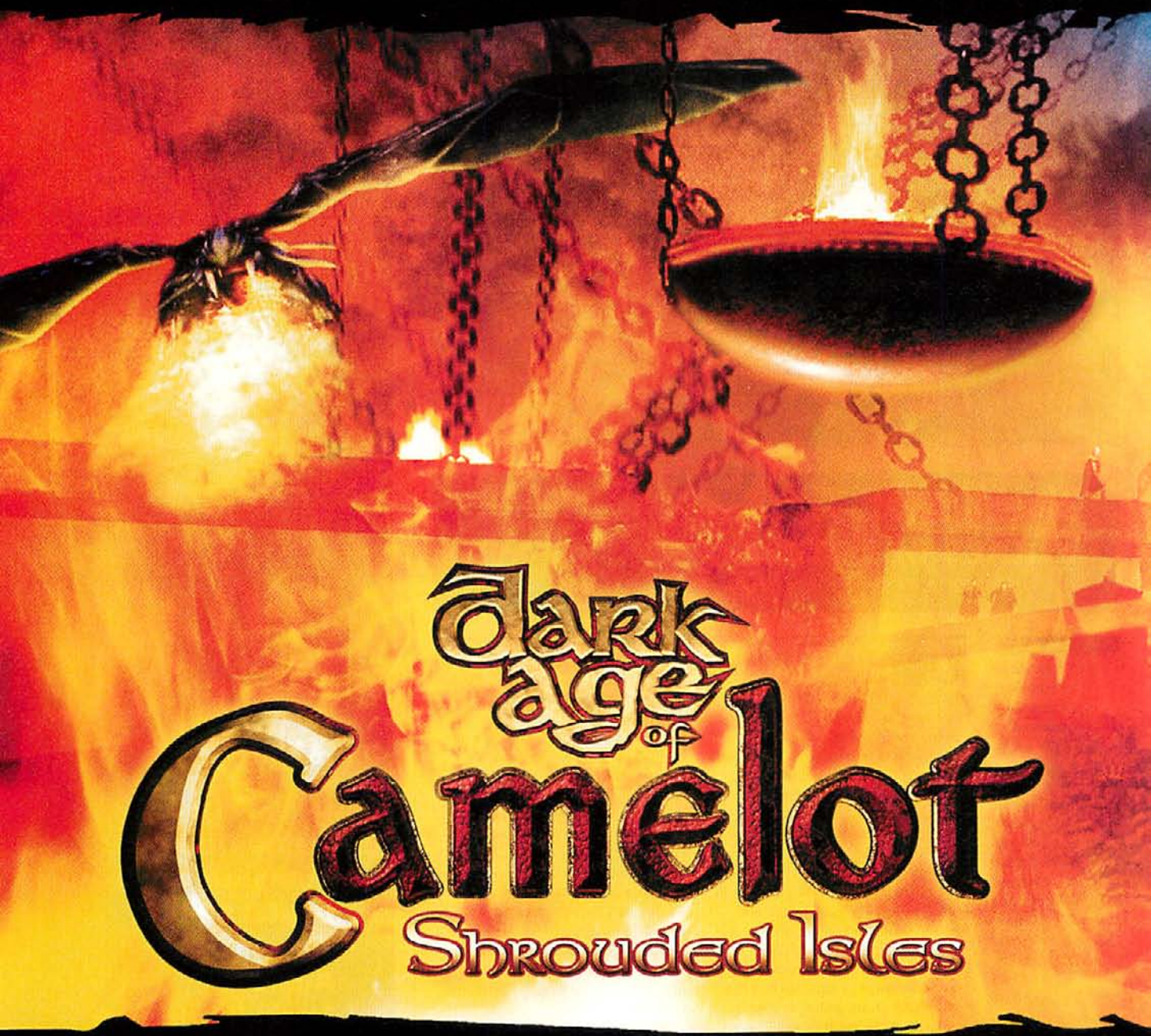
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ShadowFlare: Episode One

Diablo for dummies **BY T. BYRL BAKER**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EMURASOFT
DEVELOPER: DENYUSHA
GENRE: ACTION/RPG
ESRB RATING: TEEN; BLOOD, VIOLENCE PRICE: $15
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 450, 128MB RAM, 200MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: NONE
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-4 PLAYERS)

Finally making a showing in the States after enjoying incredible popularity in Japan, *ShadowFlare* lives up to its name by burning brightly for a few hours only to be overshadowed by the games that inspired it. This *Diablo* clone tempts players with some intriguing aspects, like accessories that let characters augment their stats by using fire, water, and other elements to defeat foes associated with opposing elements. Unfortunately, cool features can't disguise the stale, simplistic gameplay.

Players begin as generic mercenaries but switch to other classes depending on their actions. Unfortunately, wizard, warrior, and hunter are the only classes to choose from, but players are free to cross-train, and new spells and attacks open up automatically as characters level up.

Companions are the only things that set this game apart from other hack-and-slash clickfests. These animal buddies have their own elemental affiliations and are lifesavers, launching themselves at packs of enemies and leaping over walls to trigger switches. You can set companions to act autonomously or to follow simple commands.

ShadowFlare uses larger and more colorful sprites than most games of this type, but ultimately, the game's blandness kills any potential it had. There aren't enough types of monsters or equipment to keep things interesting, and quests involve little more than killing foes or fetching items. The outdoor areas look alike, as do all dungeons save the last one. Combat is repetitive because nearly all the monsters wander toward you like zombies, and although there's an online component, there's no guarantee you'll find an English-language server.



This is what happens when you poke a mage with a broadsword.

Game balance is also out of whack. Playing as a wizard is challenging at first, but at higher levels, magic attacks are devastating. Taking the warrior's path, I died only once during the entire game, and the idiotic A.I. makes a hunter's mines outrageously effective. Money is so plentiful that by the end I was throwing away thousands of gold pieces just to clear inventory space.

If $15 looks like a bargain, consider that this game is the first of four installments. The $60 you'll eventually spend is enough to buy *Diablo II* and *Divine Divinity*, two games that define what action-RPG hybrids should be.

VERDICT ★★★★★
If you want carpal tunnel syndrome, there are far more entertaining ways to contract it.

Heroes of Might & Magic IV: The Gathering Storm

Heaping disappointment on top of letdown **BY ELLIOTT CHIN**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: 3DO
DEVELOPER: NEW WORLD COMPUTING GENRE: STRATEGY
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE; ANIMATED BLOOD, VIOLENCE
PRICE: $29.95 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 300, 128MB RAM, 100MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 450, 256MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET, GAMESPY (2-6 PLAYERS)

The dearth of creatures hasn't been alleviated. The A.I. isn't appreciably better. And the few additions are available only in the new campaigns. There are no new town types, no new units to recruit, and no buildings to construct. Yeah, that's worth your $30.

We were really hoping this expansion would redeem one of our formerly favorite franchises, but *The Gathering Storm* falls far short of even previous *Heroes* expansions, such as *Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade*. Here, the real additions are more single-player campaigns and scenarios, which, for better or worse, feel very similar to the those in the original—right down to the cheating A.I. There are also four new creatures, but those appear late in the six-part campaign, and then only as adversaries controlled by the A.I.; you can't build them yourself or face them in scenario games. There are more than a dozen new artifacts, as well as a handful of new adventure objects, but definitely not enough to enhance the previous *Heroes IV* experience.

The only truly significant addition in *The Gathering Storm* is multiplayer support, which honestly should have shipped in the original game (as it did in previous *Heroes* games). If you weren't disappointed by *Heroes IV*—and, more important, have friends who feel the same way—you might want the expansion for multiplayer purposes. Otherwise, you'll find nothing here that changes your mind about the game.



You'll find five new heroes to control in *The Gathering Storm*'s six-part campaign.

VERDICT ★★★★★
It's a lot more of the same—the same grinding disenchantment.

Medal of Honor Allied Assault: Spearhead

From Normandy to Berlin in five hours flat **BY KEN BROWN**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: **EA**
DEVELOPER: **EA**
GENRE: **ACTION**
ESRB RATING: **TEEN; VIOLENCE**
PRICE: **$29.99**
REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM III 450, 128MB RAM, 800MB HARD DRIVE SPACE**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM III 700**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, INTERNET (2-64 PLAYERS)**

It's got plenty of highs and just a few lows, but the worst one is that it's over so fast. When you plunk down $30, you expect to slug it out for a week or two, but *Spearhead* bolts for Berlin faster than a Nazi found naked with a rabbi.

Spearhead's nine missions feature more of the team-based, heavily-scripted action that made *Medal of Honor* so popular. This time they're tougher and more exciting as you link up with various units to blow up a bridge carrying German reinforcements, repulse an onslaught of soldiers and tanks in the Battle of the Bulge, and take on swarms of Panzers in bomb-blasted Berlin.

The first mission alone is worthy of an award. You bail out of a troop transport into the night sky over Normandy on D-Day, crash through the roof of a barn, fight off half a dozen soldiers trying to kill you, take out the crew of an anti-aircraft gun, turn their gun on a Jerry truck carrying reinforcements, then link up with British commandos and take out a Tiger with a flak gun. Whew! Several other missions are equally intense.



This rail segment, where you're shooting armored vehicles and soldiers with a truck-mounted antitank gun, is one of the wildest in the game.

Dying repeatedly to learn the magic path can get tiresome, even in a short game.

You're running and gunning through most of the levels, but now you're able to use heavy mounted weapons that punctuate the action. You can blast troops and half-tracks with the rocket-launching Nebelwerfer, as well as anti-tank guns, flak cannons, and mortars. In addition to blasting off tank turrets and throwing enemy soldiers through the air like rag dolls, heavy weapons can also cut down trees.

In the last mission, you take over a Russian T34 and put the hurt on numerous Panzers and troops that get in your way. It's a much better experience than driving the Tiger in *MOH*, partly because it's a more hostile environment, but mostly because you can now alternate between the main gun and a .50-caliber machine gun.

But if you know what you're doing, you can plow through the game in just a few hours. So to make it last longer, the designers have made it tougher and harder to know where you're going. It's not as bad as the sniper level in *MOH*, but some areas still require you to solve the mission through trial and error. Dying repeatedly to learn the magic path can get tiresome, even in a short game.

Fortunately, the designers have also added new maps and game types to *Spearhead*'s multiplayer component. If you're not much of a multiplayer fan, then there's probably nothing here to sway you, but the servers are active day and night with plenty of raw recruits. *Spearhead* adds 13 new maps and 20 new weapons, including a portable MG42 that will shred anyone who steps in front of it. *Spearhead*'s default movement is also faster, which makes the game livelier.

But if you're only interested in single player, wait until the price drops below $20, and then you won't feel cheated when you finish the game in a weekend.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

Probably the most exhilarating and intense shooter yet...for five hours. Wait for the price to drop before you go out shooting more Jerries.



Stalking a Tiger: Get rid of that tank commander, then plant the sticky bombs quickly before the gunner wipes out your whole team.


No, this isn't a misplaced *Crimson Skies* screen. It's the P-55 Ascender, a real-life prototype aircraft you can fly during the late-war period.

Combat Flight Simulator 3

Sputtering into aerial combat **BY DENNY ATKIN**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: **MICROSOFT**
DEVELOPER: **MICROSOFT**
GENRE: **FLIGHT SIMULATION**
ESRB RATING: **EVERYONE; VIOLENCE**
PRICE: **$54.95**
REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM II 400, 64MB RAM (128MB FOR WIN 2000/XP), 900MB HARD DRIVE SPACE**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 512MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **INTERNET, LAN (2-16 PLAYERS)**

Remember the golden days of yesteryear, when valiant young American pilots took their P-80 jets into battle against Nazi flying wings? Neither do I, because it never happened. But that didn't keep Microsoft from squeezing some of that speculative, *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe* flavor into the latest *Combat Flight Sim*. Too bad they didn't bother to squeeze in a better game engine.

Kicking the tires

CFS3's missions take place from 1943 through the end of the war—and then into a hypothetical "extended war." Late in the war, you'll get to fly prototype aircraft such as the pusher-prop Curtis P-55 Ascender (or Ass-ender, as test pilots called it), the German Gotha Go-229 flying wing, and the British Vampire jet.

This is the first Microsoft sim to include flyable bombers. You can pilot various models of the B-25 Mitchell, B-26 Marauder, and Junkers Ju-88 medium bombers; or you can let the PC do the flying and jump between gun turrets and the bombardier station. Notably missing, even as A.I. aircraft, are heavy bombers like the B-17, B-24, and Lancaster, which were key to this period of the war. *CFS3* does support third-party add-on aircraft, so perhaps those will come later.

Aircraft modeling is decent enough to be convincing during combat, with differences in maximum speed, acceleration, and roll rate all well represented. Armchair test pilots won't have to dig too hard to find things to gripe about, though, such as difficulty in bleeding off speed in some planes, or the inability to dive a P-47 past Mach 1 without ripping its wings off.

Damage modeling has been beefed up, so there's much better visual representation of ruin, fire, and smoke. The sim is supposed to accurately model damage specific to those systems that were hit, but as with previous versions, it too often seems that all damage leads to the same result: Your plane is suddenly extremely difficult to turn.

A.I. pilots run the gamut from competent to insane. Some fighters will use vertical maneuvers realistically, but most are easy to drag into turning fights. The bomber behavior, though, is

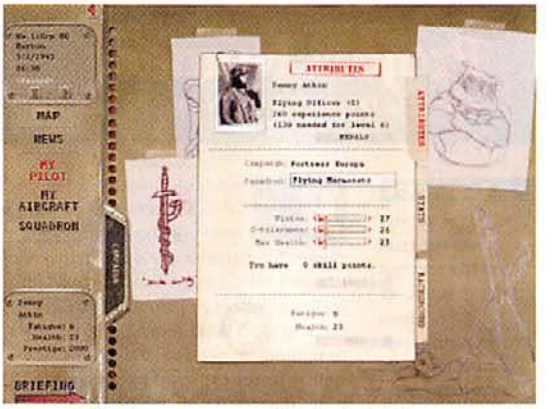
The best-looking and most entertaining sim in the series is marred by performance and A.I. problems.



Detailed damage-modeling in action.



Special effects abound; here, a P-47 flies in the rain over a just-attacked complex.



As your pilot gains experience, you'll get points that can be spent to beef up his talents, select a personal aircraft, and launch ground offensives.



A low-level shipping attack in a B-25; the cockpit is fully virtual.

especially wacky–A.I. bombers attack targets by dive-bombing them, a highly unlikely move for a real B-26.

CFS3 includes four mission modes. Quick Combat lets you define location, plane types, and form of mission, such as ground attack, escort, dogfight, or intercept. The Missions section boasts a too-small selection of historical missions, "what-if" scenarios featuring the post-war prototype aircraft, and tutorials.

The heart of the game is the dynamic Campaign mode, which lets you choose the type of missions you want to fly. Click on a map sector and you'll have your pick of ship attack, combat air patrol, recon, and more. As you win missions, the front line begins moving into enemy-held territory, and you begin amassing prestige points. With enough points, you can launch a ground offensive, but that happens fairly rarely because the number of points needed is extraordinarily high. The campaign's dynamic nature makes it infinitely replayable, but some missions end up feeling sterile; I'd like to have seen more historic missions. *CFS3* also has a slight RPG element–as your pilot gains experience, you can allocate points to improve qualities such as vision, G-force endurance, and health.

Multiplayer mode lets you mix it up in aerial dogfights or play cooperative single missions. You can even play with multiple humans in a single bomber, flying and manning the gun turrets. Unfortunately, the Campaign mode is not supported in multiplayer; the limited pool of single missions gets old quickly.

Engine problems

CFS3's new graphics engine is beautiful but cranky. Aircraft exteriors look great, with silver planes reflecting the scenery around them. Unfortunately, exterior views of aircraft other than your own are unavailable, as is the flight recorder mentioned in the documentation. Virtual cockpits are unspectacular in detail, although snap views and a padlock are both available for tracking enemies.

Special effects are impressive, with realistic smoke and explosions, and nice touches like oil slicks around sinking ships. 3D trees and buildings give an excellent sense of speed at low levels.

While it looks great when working as designed, this is the most problematic engine I've ever seen in a Microsoft sim. Using WHQL-certified drivers on a GeForce4 Ti 4600, I encountered misplaced textures, flashing damage graphics, and ground textures that morphed as my plane approached them. While the overall framerate is good, and the graphics are adjustable to match a variety of system configurations, I often encountered stuttering effects during which the action got jumpy, sped up, and then stuttered again.

CFS3 is by far the best-looking and most entertaining simulation in the series so far. But the improvements are marred by A.I. oddities and performance problems. Microsoft hasn't patched previous entries in this series, but we hope they do here, because graphical glitches and stutters mar what could be an excellent sim.

VERDICT ★★★½

It's like driving a Saab: a really great ride, but with a fairly troublesome engine.

Project Nomads

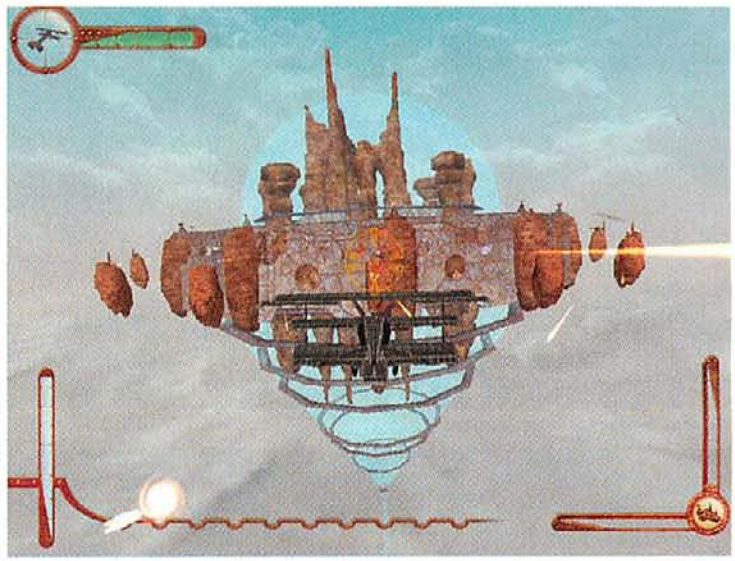
Islands in the airstream BY JEANNE KIM TRAIS

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: CDV SOFTWARE
DEVELOPER: RADON LABS
GENRE: STRATEGY/ACTION
ESRB RATING: TEEN; VIOLENCE
PRICE: $39.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 450, 64MB RAM, 850MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 1GHZ, 128MB RAM, 64MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN (2-8 PLAYERS)

Beautiful, sunset-painted landscapes of rock provide the eerie, post-apocalyptic canvas for Aeres–a world of floating islands that survived a destructive big bang–in *Project Nomads*. Aircraft ranging from WWII-reminiscent bombers to fighters inspired by dragonflies, as well as turret-constructs built on an island/battleship, all point to what could have been one flurry of exciting firefights after another. But, early on, *Nomads* becomes the casualty of a tug-of-war between ambition and execution, and regrettably fails to realize its otherwise refreshing concepts.

Take island (base) building, for example. After establishing the watchtower and lighthouse (both required for a functioning island) and placing gun towers or cannons to cover defensive duties, it doesn't take a genius to figure out from the few choices left where to build accessory buildings like a silo or hangar. In fact, most constructs have size restrictions, so you can only place them in one of two designated areas. Where's the strategy in that? *Nomads* also seems to make it a point to keep players in the dark about the state of their battleship and their enemies; the only indicators about an island's status are a vague energy bar, an alarm, and eventual bonfires. It's as if offering more information would have called attention to how thin the strategic layer of gameplay actually is in *Nomads*, so the developers decided it would be best to omit it altogether.



Solo offensive missions against imposing key structures call upon one's flight skills.

***Nomads* becomes the casualty of a tug-of-war between ambition and execution.**



Limited space on your island makes placing buildings a no-brainer, robbing the game of any real sense of strategy.



The game looks great, even during the nighttime battles.

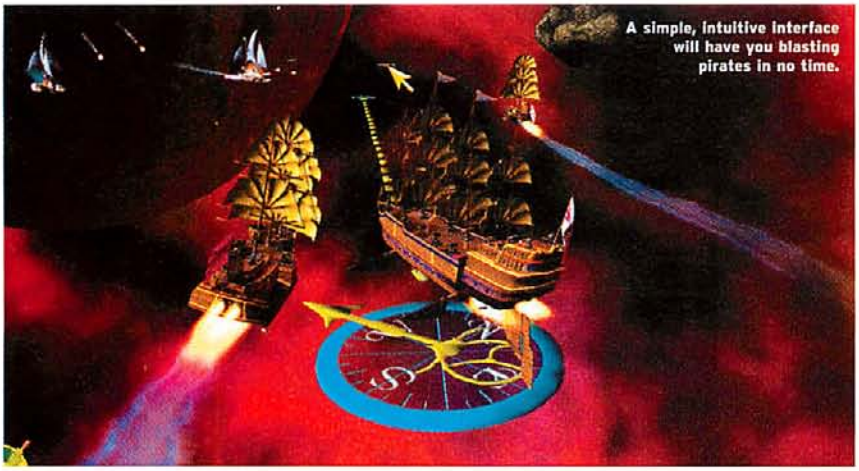
Level design also suffers from restrictions. In most missions, winning boils down to trial-and-error deduction concerning which weapon or aircraft is effective (or not) against an enemy structure, or tedious, arcadey shooting from one sublevel to the next. Although *Nomads*' third-person ground missions break up the monotony of the shooting levels, the lack of strafing coupled with annoyingly sticky collision detection and the disappointing Skrits (gassy, oversized dung beetles) make exploring an island for artifacts nothing but more maintenance. To make matters worse, after an uneventful day of using these idiotic bugs for target practice, it's not uncommon to return to your battleship and see your own fighters behaving as stupidly as the Skrits. They'll fly right into a rock face over and over again, even when nothing's attacking them.

At times, the story takes just enough of a surprising turn to keep you interested. Unique concepts like Possession, which allows jumping from, say, a cannon turret to an airborne bomber, and the artifact press, which lets you create hybrids of artifacts for more powerful structures, are engaging ideas. Quality sound effects succeed in expressing what you might imagine to be the clash of machinery or the wispy aura of magic in Aeres. Although the voiceovers are a bit overdone in some instances, overall, they're fair. The inclusion of multiplayer over a LAN highlights good intentions, but frankly, you'd probably be hard-pressed to round up two, let alone eight players interested in playing. The lack of Internet play makes this even more difficult.

Nomads' most commendable attribute is its attempt to create something new. But, although it offers a mix of strategy, vehicle-based shooting, and third-person action, none of these elements surpass mediocrity due to the lukewarm gameplay. *Project Nomads* will easily grab your attention–it just won't hold it for long.

VERDICT ★★★☆☆

All work and no play make *Nomads* a dull game.



A simple, intuitive interface will have you blasting pirates in no time.

Treasure Planet: Battle of Procyon

Lightweight delight BY LOYD CASE

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: DISNEY INTERACTIVE DEVELOPER: BARKING DOG STUDIOS GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY ESRB RATING: EVERYONE PRICE: $29.99 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 450, 128MB RAM, 750MB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: NONE MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-8 PLAYERS)

Think of *Treasure Planet* as *Starfleet Command* for kids, only with rocket-powered sailing vessels maneuvering in space across the etherium, surrounded by planets right out of a Roger Dean painting. It's Jules Verne run riot, but with laserball cannons, pocket black holes, and a feline, feminine, feisty admiral handing out your missions.

The game takes place after the events of the Disney movie. You are Jim Hawkins, the movie's hero, now a junior officer in Her Majesty's navy. At the start of the single-player game, you're given a torpedo boat to conduct your initial missions. As the game progresses, you gain victory points that you spend on better crew and weapons—but not ships, as they're handed to you in the campaign.

The lively pace will have you eagerly clicking the Next Mission button.

An entertaining, if predictable, story of treachery and redemption unfolds as you take on tasks such as ferreting out pirates, delivering relief supplies, and escorting transport ships. The lively pace will have you eagerly clicking the Next Mission button.

The single-player campaign is a terrific introduction to real-time tactical-combat games. My 11-year-old daughter is having a great time working through it. The campaign is great, as far as it goes, but it's too short and relatively easy for experienced gamers. If that was all there was, *Treasure Planet* would be only a couple evenings of light entertainment for most players.

Thankfully, there's Skirmish mode. The A.I. is merely competent, but the point system for buying ships, crew, and weapons creates balanced, challenging battles. *Treasure Planet* also supports up to eight players in multiplayer, although the maps are the same as the ones in Skirmish mode. You can play in the historical scenarios or with open maps, some of which allow you to co-op play against the A.I.

The one downside is the lack of a scenario generator or map editor. Developer Barking Dog Studios has the tools ready to roll, but Disney is waiting to see how the game is received before releasing them. The game would be much better with these additions. As it is, all the maps are text-based, so you can go in and change them by hand if you're willing and able.

All told, *Treasure Planet* offers exhilarating combat in a fantastic setting, with skirmish and multiplayer action that will have you sneaking the CD out of your kids' computer.

VERDICT ★★★★★

If this surprisingly engaging but short real-time tactical game had a scenario generator, we'd be adding half a star to the score.

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MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries

Strong game design turns a great game into a classic **BY GEORGE JONES**



GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
DEVELOPER: CYBERLORE STUDIOS
GENRE: GIANT ROBOT SIM
ESRB RATING: TEEN; ANIMATED VIOLENCE
PRICE: $49.95
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 700, 128MB RAM, 1GB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-16 PLAYERS)

Technically an expansion to *MechWarrior 4: Vengeance*, *Mercenaries* is a stand-alone game, requiring neither expertise nor familiarity with previous editions of the game. The gorgeous graphics engine, stunning sound effects, and excellent enemy and lancemate A.I. haven't changed much in the two years since the original's groundbreaking release, but the play mechanics and overall flow and pacing sure have. The end result is one of the most satisfying games of 2002.

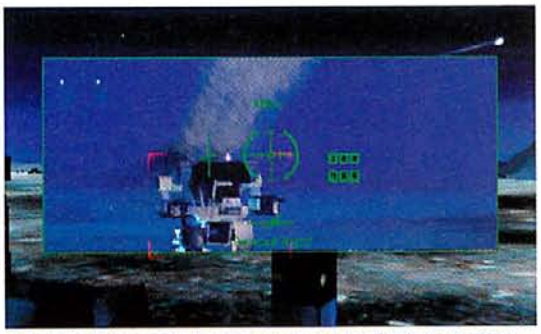
The most appealing and surprising aspect of *Mercs* is how shockingly fast and entertaining combat feels. Once you drop into a mission, it rarely takes more than a few seconds for the action to heat up. The battle feels frenetic, furious...and manageable. You never feel out of control, and your tasks are straightforward and specific. That's a far cry from previous games in the series, which have had a tendency to get bogged down in nav points and overly complex mission objectives.



The exciting battles in *MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries* will leave you standing and shouting.



Part of *Mech: Mercs'* appeal is the destructive payoff that comes when you figure out the perfect combination of weapons.



Using the mouse and keyboard instead of a joystick is much more enjoyable and effective—the mouse allows for easier aiming and firing.

The end result is one of the most satisfying games of 2002.

That Cyberlore Studios was able to so perfectly blend near-arcade action with the deeper tactical elements of the *MechWarrior* franchise is a minor victory in itself. The complexity and difficulty of the 30-plus nonlinear missions increase gradually—and in just the right doses. Even when victory requires multiple attempts, you're not likely to spend more than 15 minutes on any one mission. And with the exception of the final battle, which *should* be tough, the game never becomes discouraging to play.

Although *Mercs* still clings to the outdated notion that losing a mission means you have to replay it until you succeed—a nonlinear game should allow you to continue even when you lose—the game's mechanics are still inspiring. Basic, powerful elements of game design are at play here. You're rewarded with salvaged mechanized robots that you can customize, and variety in the form of different mission types, such as a spectacularly eerie, no-radar night sortie.

And then there's the wide-open gameplay, which allows you to pick and choose your missions, and a story that branches depending on your choices. Unfortunately, only the most devout, interested, or compulsive will notice this, because a large percentage of the story is background info, depicted solely through big chunks of text and short voice-overs. This is the title's only major shortcoming, and it has plagued every game in the series. But what does a money-hungry mercenary care about politics and intrigue, anyway?

Granted, it's no easy task to incorporate big-budget cut-scenes and an epic story into a game design that allows players to pick and choose missions whenever and wherever they desire. But the setup seems like a no-brainer for the kind of financial success and mainstream accessibility that companies like SquareSoft have created with the *Final Fantasy* franchise. The payoff will be huge if Microsoft invests in some extra development, because *Mercs*, more than any other game in the series, is imminently playable and perfectly suited for a broad audience. Action-game broad. Big-money broad. Xbox-version broad. Major motion picture broad.

Someday, this sci-fi universe is going to be huge. When it finally happens, fans of *MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries* won't be surprised. Hey, we knew it all along.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Probably the best *MechWarrior* game in the series.



The heart of the program is scheduling flight orders to match your resources.

Airline Tycoon Evolution

Manage the friendly skies BY JEFF LACKEY

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: STRATEGY FIRST
DEVELOPER: SPELLBOUND STUDIOS GENRE: BUSINESS SIM ESRB RATING: EVERYONE
PRICE: $29.95 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 300, 64MB RAM, 600MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D CARD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: INTERNET, LAN (2-4 PLAYERS)

Airline Tycoon Evolution is an odd beast—an owl dressed up in peacock feathers. The whimsical graphics imply a lighthearted romp along the lines of, say, *Roller Coaster Tycoon*. However, there's a detailed management sim under the brightly colored, arcade-like surface.

Airline Tycoon Evolution puts you in the boss' chair of one of four airlines at the global airport location of your choice. The day starts with an evaluation by the airport manager, after which you run around the airport in sidescroller fashion to the various locations that require your attention. The characters you encounter range from comical to bizarre, but most have a serious purpose behind their humorous appearance.

The core of the game is handling orders to move people or cargo from one location to another within a specified time limit. Your profitability depends primarily on maintaining a good stable of aircraft, selecting the best orders, and planning flight logistics (e.g., if you take an order to carry 180 people from Houston to Rome, you'd better have an order to fly back from Rome to Houston). Thus, much of the game revolves around trying to grab the best-paying orders and purchasing better planes. Other ways to enhance your business include advertising, negotiating for fuel futures, trading stock, hiring and firing personnel, and upgrading your planes' features.

So, how is this game different than the original *Airline Tycoon*? The short answer: a new campaign, 10 new missions, some new airport locations, and a new aircraft designer. While the cynical may wonder if this is a thinly veiled attempt to squeeze money from an old product, the additions do inject new flavor to the game. For example, the security office allows you to purchase ways to protect yourself from sabotage, and this protection can give you the edge in a close game. And the aircraft designer can create new order opportunities—if you can design a plane with superior capacity and range (and can afford to buy it).



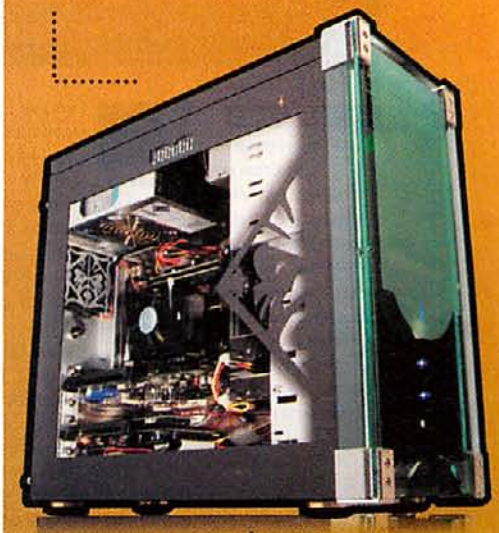
Be nice to the characters in the game and they'll be nice to you. This lady is grateful you found her missing bra. No, you read that right.

Understand what you're getting in *Airline Tycoon Evolution*, and you may accomplish what eludes most airlines today: fun and profitability.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Beneath the cartoonish atmosphere lies a relatively complex business-management simulation.

BETTER BY DESIGN



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Worms Blast

The worm has turned **BY ROB SMOLKA**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: **UBI SOFT** DEVELOPER: **TEAM 17** GENRE: **PUZZLE** ESRB RATING: **EVERYONE** PRICE: **$29.99** REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM II 350, 64MB RAM, 110MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM III 450, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D CARD, GAMEPAD** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **HOTSEAT (2 PLAYERS)**

If you've played any *Bust-A-Move* games on a console, you'll have a good idea of the basics behind *Worms Blast*. The general goal of the game is to clear away colored blocks at the top of the screen by shooting ammunition at them. The many variations on this basic theme help keep things somewhat interesting, but that's the core of the gameplay. As a big fan of the prior turn-based *Worms* games, I found myself really disappointed by this unwelcome shift away from the giddy worm-versus-worm combat of earlier games.

The 3D graphics look good—they retain the style of the older games, as do the quirky voices and sounds. The control scheme is also reminiscent of the rest of the series: You use the keyboard to move left or right, choose the angle of your shot, and decide how much power to use by holding down the Fire key. It's a simple method that works quite well... in a turn-based game. Unfortunately, the many modes of *Worms Blast* are all timed, either by an actual time limit or a frenzied rush to eliminate the lower levels of blocks before they reach you. Maybe I'm just spastic, but after many games, I still find the controls terribly difficult to use.

In its favor, *Worms Blast* has a good deal of variety. Roughly 60 levels of Puzzle mode present a ton of challenges, such as clearing an entire level in a limited amount of time or with a limited amount of ammo, or collecting or avoiding falling objects. In Tournament mode, you'll find five minigames with similar objectives, but they're frenetic and tend to be over rather quickly. There's also a series of two-player contests in which you can race against the CPU or another player to clear a level, collect items, etc.



Interactivity in the multiplayer game is limited to lobbing a few bazooka shells at your opponent through the opening in the barrier.

One cool feature of the game is an opening between the two sides, which allows you to fire at your opponent if you time your shot just right. All the modes and levels share one particular trait: They're extremely difficult, even after you master the controls.

Worms Blast isn't a bad game, but even with the variety of modes and goals, I found myself growing bored too quickly and frustrated even more often. My hope is that for the next game in the series, Team 17 will return *Worms* to its former direction, while maintaining the high level of creativity that went into the design of *Worms Blast*.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆

The new direction the designers chose for the *Worms* series is not for the better.

Beam Breakers

Space racing my ass—where's Milla Jovovich? **BY DARREN GLADSTONE**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: **JOWOOD** DEVELOPER: **SIMILIS SOFTWARE** GENRE: **SCI-FI RACING** ESRB RATING: **EVERYONE** PRICE: **$29.95** REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM II 400, 16MB RAM, 500MB HARD DRIVE SPACE** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM III 750, 32MB RAM** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN (2-6 PLAYERS)**

Despite the lame names (*Beam Breakers*? Neo-York? You guys are killing me here!), this game plays like a PC tribute to the mean skyways shown in *The Fifth Element*. The game even offers instant flashbacks to Bruce Willis spouting inane comments while dodging cops and oncoming traffic. There are some notable attempts to re-create the cinematic movie races in decent detail, but after a few races, it all comes across as generic.

The audio is hardly award-winning, with lame voice taunts and an annoying "computer" voice that warns you of your ship status, but the biggest possible knock is for something this game doesn't have: speed. It feels like you're moving in slow motion, the racers are sluggish at best, and traffic "swarming" around you feels more like grannies on the freeway than a frantic cruise through rush hour.

Beam Breakers does try to compensate with varied gameplay. In one of 30 upgradeable racers, you speed around 30 pre-charted courses throughout the city. A nice touch: You can take shortcuts through alleys or between buildings in order to finish first. There's also a 57-mission campaign, though I found it hard to care about the plight of a pizza delivery boy who's mixed up with the mob.

Ultimately, the controls are easy to pick up, although it was more tempting to break the keyboard than the game's "beams." There's some high-flying fun in this racer, but the numerous unnecessary hurdles will send you cruising back to the store to return *Beam Breakers*.



A virtual Bruce Willis waiting for a fare to drop in, or a mission in *Beam Breakers*? You make the call.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆

If *Beam Breakers* weren't a flying-car racing game, we'd be making jokes right here about it having flat tires and running out of gas.

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NHL 2003

Hi-octane pseudo-hockey BY ROB SMOLKA

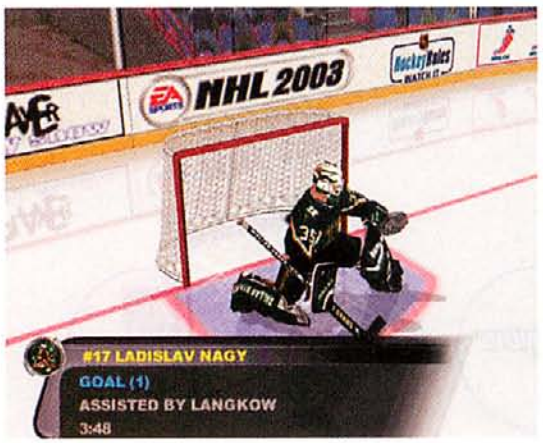
GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EA SPORTS
DEVELOPER: EA SPORTS
GENRE: SPORTS
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE
PRICE: $49.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 350, 64MB RAM, 150MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4 1GHZ, 128MB RAM, 600MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD, GAMEPAD
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, MODEM, INTERNET (2-12 PLAYERS)

There comes a point when it's apparent that something you've been hoping for is just not going to happen, and you have to come to grips with that fact. This is where I'm at with EA Sports' *NHL* series. The game will just never be the hockey simulation so many of us have been pining for. It has been, is, and always will be an arcade game of hockey, and no amount of criticism or whining will change that. So, now that I've given up the ghost, I can look clearly at the game without saddling it with any undue expectations.

Perhaps the biggest problem is that *NHL 2003* isn't much of a leap over last year's game...or the one from the year before that, or the year before that. There are updated rosters, a spiffy new menu, a host of cool animations, and improved presentation, but beyond that, it essentially plays like the same game we've seen since the days of the Sega Genesis. In fact, the A.I. in this year's version is so lame, it may be a step backward.

Programming the goalies must be a huge challenge since they vary so greatly from year to year. This year's version features Swiss cheese-like boneheads. High-scoring games are commonplace, with shots hitting the back of the net early and often. You can't place all the blame on the goalies, though; the empty-headed defensemen must be chastised as well. Setting up one-timers (and, conversely, defending one-timers) is child's play; the defensemen are completely clueless about how to prevent this from happening. It leads to ludicrous shots-on-goal numbers and scores more reminiscent of a basketball game than a hockey match, regardless of the difficulty. You can increase the goalie's abilities via sliders, but only in exhibition games (not in Franchise mode...why?), and the options are suspect at best.



Get used to this sight: This year's goalies are absolutely terrible.



The fighting in *NHL 2003* is boring and ugly, which is strange since it's just the kind of peripheral part of the game that EA Sports generally focuses on.

NHL 2003 isn't that much of a leap over last year's game...or the one from the year before that.

If you can get past these little problems, you'll find a game that looks great (except for the laughably bad-looking fighting sequences), controls really well, and can deliver an adrenaline rush as exciting as any first-person shooter. The new deke-control feature is nifty and comes in especially handy against another human player, if only for the purpose of showing off. The online play is fairly solid (although there's still too much lag for my liking, even over a cable modem), and there's nothing better than daisy-chaining a few joysticks when some friends come over.



Some of the zoom-out views are of limited use.

Like so many other things in today's world, the *NHL* series is moving more toward the mantra of style over substance, with a feature list boasting a sound track of today's "hot" bands and the ridiculous, one-on-one heartbeat zoom cam during breakaways that's useless and distracting. Even the announcers have become completely wacky, with more emphasis on being cute than trying to emulate a real hockey broadcast.

In the end, the single-player game is enjoyable for a short while, but as soon as you gain any skill whatsoever, you'll get bored by regularly trouncing the CPU, and you'll start looking for real people to play against. I know I'll only be returning to *NHL 2003* for its multiplayer capabilities.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

It may not resemble real hockey, but it does have its moments.

Civilization III: Play the World

Broken, sloppy, frustrating, overdue, and expensive—but who are we to complain? **BY THOMAS L. MCDONALD**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: **FIRAXIS/INFOGRAMES**
DEVELOPER: **FIRAXIS**
GENRE: **STRATEGY**
ESRB RATING: **EVERYONE**
PRICE: **$29.99**
REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM II 400, 32MB RAM, 500MB HARD DRIVE SPACE**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM III, 64MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, INTERNET, HOTSEAT, E-MAIL (2-8 PLAYERS)**

It's hard to reconcile the reputation of Firaxis with the shoddy, inexcusable mess that is *Play the World*. A full year after *Civilization III* debuted with no multiplayer support, *Play the World* arrives promising connectivity and new play modes at the low, low price of just $30. It's a promise Firaxis couldn't keep. *Play the World* is, simply, the worst implementation of multiplayer gaming in recent memory.

The specs seem so promising when you first read the box: LAN, hotseat, e-mail, and Internet via GameSpy support; new play modes; new civs; new units; new maps. And, given both the title and the generally modest quality of the additional offerings, multiplayer is front and center for this enhancement. So, what's so wrong? Well, there's the fact that the Multiplayer mode doesn't work. That's right: I defy anyone to complete an online game without a single crash. It's simply not possible. Hard and soft crashes dog every session, with no noticeable triggers outside the mere act of connecting.



Among the new things you can build are a stock exchange (generating more money), a civil-defense city improvement, and a radar-tower terrain improvement (both aiding in defensive play).

The worst implementation of multiplayer gaming in recent memory.

Both LAN and Internet games pause for regularly scheduled tours of your desktop—but hey, that Hotseat mode sure works great.

But wait! There's more! When it *is* connected, it runs like a dog—and a dead dog at that. Lag in a 2D strategy game with seemingly meager bandwidth requirements is an indication that all is not well at Casa Firaxis. This should have been a pretty rudimentary implementation of network code; the challenge should have been in keeping games well paced and balanced over the course of several hours. And Firaxis actually came up with a variety of novel ways to do that. Aside from the standard turn mode, there's a simultaneous turn mode (all players make their decisions at once, and then the game executes them), and a "turnless" pseudo real-time mode. This works by performing end-turn tasks (refreshing move points, building, etc.) on a continual, timed cycle. However, this assumes a set amount of time per turn: an absurd prospect in *Civ*, where some turns are click-bys as you wait for a build, and others take quite a bit longer. It's totally unusable.

It would be charitable to call the rest of the package an afterthought; it's much more like a half-terthought. Oh yeah, there are eight new civs, each with a new unit, but the differences are marginal. The civs seems stronger overall, but the new units are simply modifications of existing ones. The Arab ansar warrior is a faster, more vulnerable knight; the Carthaginian numidian mercenary is an upgraded spearman with a stronger attack but less defense; and so on. Only the Korean hwach'a—an upgraded cannon with 50 percent more attack strength and the ability to bombard adjacent targets—really impresses. The new maps are primarily culled from fan sites and are tossed into the package with minimal order or explanation.

There isn't a single element of this package worth $3, much less $30, so save your money. All-in-all, this expansion is an utter debacle.



The scenarios and maps that come with *Play the World* are taken almost entirely from the Internet, where they're available for free.



The Celts join the Arabs, Carthaginians, Spanish, Vikings, Koreans, Mongols, and Ottomans (the Empire, not the footstool) among the ranks of new civilizations in *Play the World*.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The central purpose of the game—multiplayer support—doesn't work, and the rest is largely junk.



The physics model is pretty convincing, but boy are those background graphics an eyesore!

NASCAR Thunder 2003

On the right track BY ROB SMOLKA

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: EA SPORTS
DEVELOPER: EA SPORTS
GENRE: RACING
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE
PRICE: $39.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM, 750MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM 4 1GHZ, 256MB RAM, STEERING WHEEL
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-16 PLAYERS)

EA is shooting for a serious simulation with *Thunder*, and it has mostly succeeded. This game is a big improvement over the painfully bad *NASCAR Revolution*. The physics model feels pretty convincing, from the handling of the vehicles to the way the car will take to the skies when the conditions are just right during a high-speed collision. Like most respectable sims, *Thunder* has plenty of driving aids available, but you really don't experience the full enjoyment the game can provide until you handle all the tasks yourself. Players can tweak the A.I. and the aggressiveness of the drivers, and, with a little experimentation, everyone can set the game up to match their abilities and deliver a lot of great racing action.

The A.I. isn't perfect, however. While the CPU drivers perform fairly realistically during a race, they don't seem to know what to do when abnormal events occur. I've seen too many instances where they'll just plow into a car rather than try to avoid an accident. Pit stops are another area of concern, as the drivers don't show any common sense, such as pitting in order to take advantage of yellow flags.

Overall, the look of *NASCAR Thunder* is slightly above average, but only because the cars look so great. The rest of the surroundings are fairly mundane, with lots of blurry textures and many downright ugly trackside objects. There's also a weird, very distracting texture-swapping effect that takes place when cars change their distance from you. The dynamic damage modeling is pretty impressive, though, and you'll see all kinds of dings, dents, and destruction throughout the races. The animated pit crews are awfully sweet, as well.



The dynamic damage modeling does a great job of making each fender bender unique.

The biggest knock against *Thunder* is its lack of extras. It has the basics down, with impressive garage features, a huge selection of tracks and drivers, and the option to race the complete NASCAR season, but that's where it ends. There's no Career mode or any kind of Scenario mode that has become a staple of EA Sports' other franchises. Gallingly, these features, and many more, are included in the console versions of the game. Even the Multiplayer mode is of the cut-rate variety with its 16-car limit.

With Papyrus' *NASCAR Racing 2002* on the shelves, there's really no reason to consider *Thunder* and its inferior racing experience. But *Thunder* is a very respectable racing simulation that could be a worthy competitor someday.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

A solid racing game that still pales in comparison to Papyrus' *NASCAR Racing 2002*.

GAME PATCHES

Revisionist History

Medieval: Total War

By Thomas L. McDonald

The initial release of *Medieval* wasn't freighted with many problems, so the vast list of changes and improvements for the version 1.1 patch mostly adds up to fine-tuning: fixes for Millennium and Radeon cards, expanded console commands, and fixes and tweaks for both single-player and multiplayer games.

Unfortunately, one of the more



consistently vexing problems remains: the rebel forces bug. According to Activision, "Rebellions no longer produce troops that require technology that the faction in question does not possess," which is a new feature that can be turned off with a command-line switch. The larger problem with rebel forces, however, was their quality, which often was too high to be either plausible or balanced. Rebels in the new version also seem to spawn in larger numbers than previously—a fresh bug?

On the plus side, the A.I. is certainly better, particularly its use of cavalry, kings, and generals. Cavalry performance is tight. They'll often break off an attack against infantry in order to take another run at them, sometimes from a different angle, which is what they should do. Computer opponents seem to build more balanced forces and use better tactics overall. In the interest of realism, sieges now take longer, and artillery is more effective.

Extensive tweaking to the vice/virtue element also aids in game balance, with the abilities now affecting generals immediately, not randomly. Several different vice/virtue values have been modified, such as Master of Numbers properly giving its +3 bonus to acumen. In addition, some problems have been ironed out in the campaign maps, and loyalty is easier to manage.

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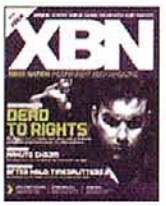
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Hearts of Iron

Fighting World War II hour by hour BY DI LUO

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: STRATEGY FIRST
DEVELOPER: PARADOX ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE: STRATEGY
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE
PRICE: $44.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 300, 64MB RAM, 120MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM III 450, 128MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, INTERNET (2-16 PLAYERS)

Hearts of Iron is not for anyone who wishes to have a life outside of gaming. No computer game in recent memory has attempted to recreate World War II on a global scale, much less do it with hourly turns. In *Hearts*, you must guide a nation through the tumultuous years between 1936 and 1948. Doing so requires painstaking attention to detail and hours of play to complete a single scenario.

As the supreme commander of any independent nation during the WWII era, your powers are god-like. You can starve your population, fix elections, and command any military unit. Although the scale of the game is dauntingly vast, the mechanics are relatively simple. *Hearts of Iron*'s developers aren't new to grand strategy games, and they have constructed an accessible and clean interface.

Units are divisional in scale and may be formed into corps, assigned commanders, and ordered around the map with great precision—right down to dictating the arrival time for each unit. Aircraft squadrons and naval flotillas are also under your command, and successful campaigns will usually require well-coordinated, combined arms assaults. Even though you can't intervene directly in a battle, you can affect its outcome by dictating the aggressiveness of an assault, sending in bombing sorties, and attaching specialized units, such as engineers or artillery.

Although the battles are important, the heart of the game lies in its economic system. Each nation has an industrial capacity that fulfills all its needs. You must balance the resources devoted to feeding your subjects, conducting research, building new units, and supplying your troops. Capacity may be increased, but thousands of factories won't do you any good unless you have a steady supply of raw materials, and obtaining these materials is the driving force behind conquest. Managing this economic system is very important—even the greatest army in the world can't fight on an empty stomach.

All this detail creates a game full of intriguing strategic possibilities and endless replay value. Unfortunately, the various sides feel generic, and other than a difference in geography, strategies don't differ much when playing either communist China or the United States. Even a power such as Yugoslavia, which relied on partisans and captured weapons in real life, requires a steady supply of rubber in the game and can easily create tanks and planes in its mountain hideouts.



The German behemoth prepares to thrust into the heart of Russia.

A.I. nations will usually disintegrate, and you can conquer half the world without much trouble.



Conquering a province will bring essential materials to your war effort.

The A.I. also detracts from the game. It can rarely mount a coordinated offensive, and it has a great deal of trouble handling the economy. Within a year or two of game time, A.I. nations will usually disintegrate, and you can conquer half the world without much trouble. The bad A.I. makes the diplomatic model nearly useless, and allies are practically worthless. You're better off conquering everybody rather than making friends.

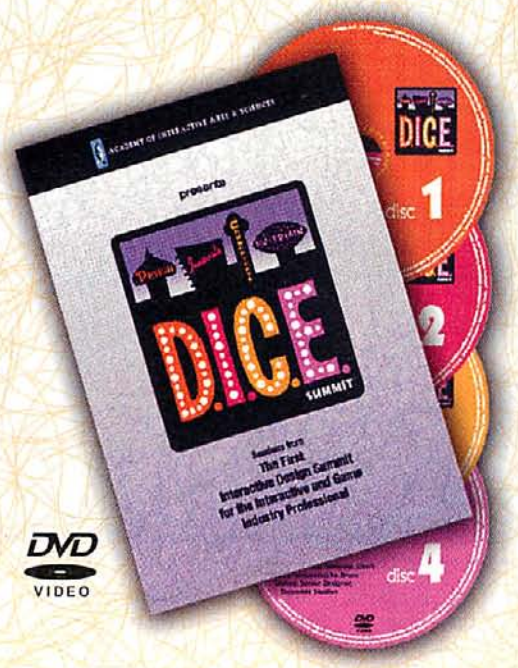
Hearts of Iron has very little in the way of automation, and actions such as ordering air sorties or resupplying your fleets become tedious. Adding to the problems are frequent crashes and bugs like missing graphics files and broken scripts.

Although its faults are many, *Hearts of Iron*'s ambitious design must be admired. For those willing to wade through the tedium and the bugs, the game offers depth and replay value that grognards will probably enjoy despite deficiencies.

VERDICT ★★★½☆

A heart of iron indeed, but also a brain of pudding.

Learn From The Masters!

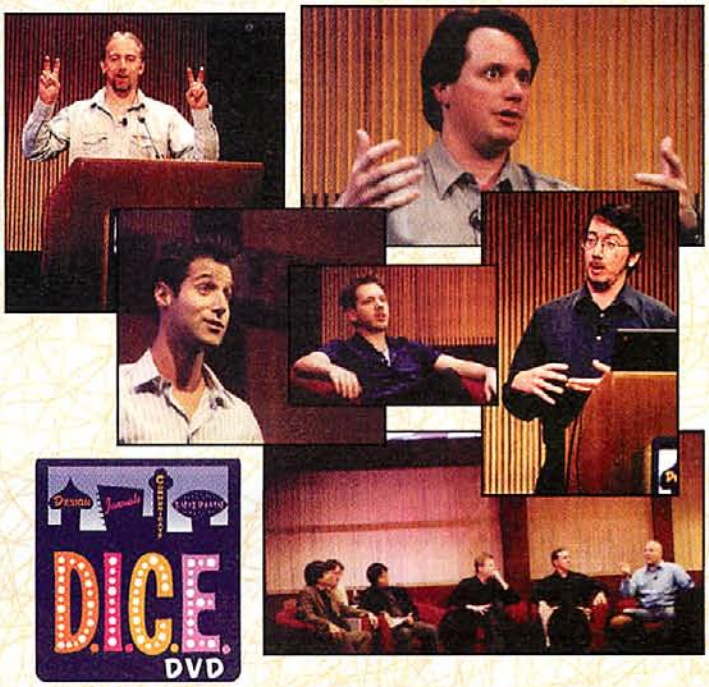




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Virtua Tennis

Fault! BY TOM CHICK

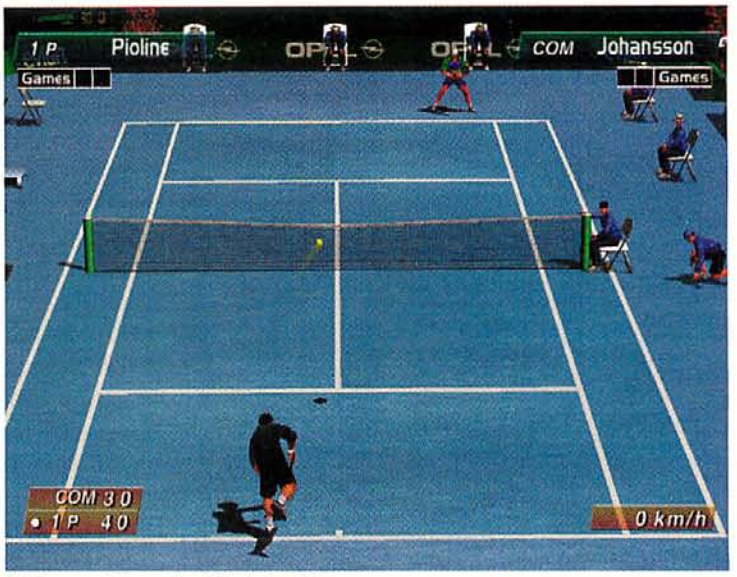
GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION VALUE
DEVELOPER: SEGA GENRE: SPORTS SIM ESRB RATING: EVERYONE
PRICE: $29.99 REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 450, 64MB RAM, 310MB HARD DRIVE SPACE
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: GAMEPAD MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: LAN, HOTSEAT, INTERNET (2-4 PLAYERS)

You would love *Virtua Tennis*. It's OK if you don't even care about tennis itself. The fact remains that you would love *Virtua Tennis*. Yes, you who doesn't know a score of love from nothing would love *Virtua Tennis*. If you can't tell Venus from Serena, you would still love *Virtua Tennis*. Unfortunately, if you don't have a Sega Dreamcast hooked up to your television, your only recourse is this disappointing PC port.

Virtua Tennis is the hypnotic simplicity of *Pong*, but with tennis-shaped graphics laid over it. Your job is to simply move your paddle, in this case an elaborately animated polygonal model of a famous tennis player, in front of the oncoming ball. Once you've done this, you hold down the Swing button and the polygonal model takes over from there, doing fancy-looking things that make you feel supersmooth and graceful. Except, of course, for those times you screw up, in which case your polygonal model might do frantic things like diving, rolling, swinging wildly, or other displays of athletic determination. Ultimately, the game offers a great sense of accomplishment while requiring only a minimal amount of skill, almost like mashing buttons in a fighting game and pulling off some dramatic combo, but not as fast, cheap, and out of control.

Unfortunately, this PC version of *Virtua Tennis* is one of those poorly executed ports that feels like someone slapped it together in his spare time. The Main Splash screen instructs you to "Press the start button," the subtext being, "You *do* have a gamepad, don't you?" This subtext is reinforced when you reach for your mouse to navigate the menu and find there's no mouse support. Using the keyboard is a lousy way to control your player, but this game refuses to recognize any analog device with fewer than five buttons.



Thirty years later, we're still playing *Pong*.

Virtua Tennis is a sublime multiplayer experience, particularly with four players. Ideally, they should be sitting shoulder-to-shoulder, but that's not how the Internet works. However, without any online player-matching support, you're probably not going to be playing on the Internet. You'll be stuck taking on the ruthless A.I. opponents until you get a LAN or persuade your friends to crowd in front of your computer, where at least one unlucky schmuck will be stuck using the keyboard to play. Ultimately, this is a fifth-rate way to experience the joys of *Virtua Tennis*. Your $30 would be better spent going toward a used Dreamcast from eBay along with a cheap copy of the original game.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆
A half-hearted port of a brilliant game.

Rayman Arena

He'll steal your heart and probably destroy your CD drive, too BY ERIK WOLPAW

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: UBI SOFT
DEVELOPER: UBI SOFT
GENRE: MASCOT RACING
ESRB RATING: EVERYONE; MILD VIOLENCE PRICE: $19.99
REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II 450, 64MB RAM, 660MB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: NONE
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: SPLITSCREEN, LAN (2-4 PLAYERS)

Since every successful platform-jumping series eventually spawns a racing-focused sequel, actuarial scientists have warned us for years to expect the release of some sort of *Rayman*-endorsed karting product. I'm happy to report that we can all stop thinking about it now, because *Rayman Arena* is that game. Against the odds, however, it doesn't actually involve driving karts. Instead, you pilot one of the loveable *Rayman* characters through a series of footraces across a bunch of wacky-tobaccy inspired surreal landscapes. Other than the fact that it was created by the French, there's nothing particularly offensive about the game part of *Rayman Arena*. You run around and jump a little, and there's a Battle mode, and one level is haunted.

But here's the thing: The game comes packaged on two discs. Which is fine, because, you know, that means more *Rayman*, right? The problem is that for some insane reason, the developers decided that you have to insert both discs in sequence every time the game boots. I feel like one of those shocked society women at the pie fight clutching my chest while saying, "Well, I never." Because—really—I seriously never have. It's just completely preposterous.



Whatever's in that coffin is probably adorable.

***Rayman Arena* is a karting product that doesn't actually involve driving karts.**

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆
Two too many disc swaps.

Real War: Rogue States

Oh no it (still) isn't, Mister **BY JOHN FLETCHER**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: **SIMON & SCHUSTER**
DEVELOPER: **RIVAL INTERACTIVE**
GENRE: **REAL-TIME STRATEGY**
ESRB RATING: **TEEN; VIOLENCE** PRICE: **$29.99** REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM III 600, 128MB RAM, 600MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 16MB 3D CARD**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM III 800, 32MB 3D CARD**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **MODEM (2 PLAYERS)**

Real War: Rogue States is a revamp of last year's horrid *Real War*. Having reviewed that dog, I approached this version with more than a little dread. I'm still revolted by the marketing pimps who designed the box art; it takes real *cojones* to put the claim "best-selling" on this series, and the inclusion of the phrases "rogue states," "axis of evil," and "terrorist forces" seems opportunist, but as a game *Real War* makes some amends.

In *RWRS*, the dreaded ILA, that bizarre Russo-Islamic panglobal terror state, is back. How Rival Interactive ever came up with this pairing and maintained any credibility with its customers at the Department of Defense is beyond me. Anyhow, the ILA, after being eradicated "last year," has somehow rebuilt (with bases and hardware all across the globe) and is challenging U.S. power again, to the great surprise of R. Lee Ermey, who reprises his role as U.S. briefing officer/heckler.

Premise aside, *RWRS* has its share of improvements. The A.I. is far superior to the original, which means it's gone from pathetic to passable. This fix alone earns a half star since you can now actually play the game instead of spending all night trying to get your troops across a bridge or through the woods. There are assignable group-attack styles, such as simultaneous or concentrated, that allow for some strategy. A nice new feature, called predeployment orders, allows you to assign orders to units in the build queue. It's very useful for defending your base. Just make a force, assign them to protect, and forget about them.



Rogue States **updates its look with effects like smoke, explosions, and moving buildings.**

On the downside, *RWRS* plays too fast for its own good. Many units have unique abilities or specific opponents, but all too often, I found my special unit was toast long before I had the ability to select him, activate his function, and designate a target. Infantry are still afterthoughts—too small to control and too easy to kill, they're best used to claim supply depots or man bunkers. Finally, the targeting A.I. is still weak, with units ignoring obvious threats or refusing to fire until manually targeted.

Despite the skewed worldview, *RWRS* has enough improvements to make it a passable RTS. It won't set the world on fire, but you won't feel like you wasted your money.

The A.I. is far superior to the original, having gone from pathetic to passable.

VERDICT ★★½☆☆
Enough fixes to make a horrid game tolerable—barely.

Eagles Strike

Hit it hard, fast, and often **BY JOHN FLETCHER**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: **HPS SIMULATIONS**
DEVELOPER: **JOHN TILLER**
GENRE: **WARGAME**
ESRB RATING: **NOT RATED** PRICE: **$49.99** REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM 133, 32MB RAM, 250MB HARD DRIVE SPACE**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **NONE**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **MODEM, E-MAIL (2 PLAYERS)**

Eagles Strike, the latest in the *Squad Battles* series, covers company- to battalion-sized battles, this time following the Americans in Western Europe, from D-Day to early 1945. There's not a lot new here, system wise. But the game does have tense, well-balanced scenarios and an A.I. better than some games with 10 times the budget. Most of the scenarios center on Normandy and the Bulge, but there are some nice obscure actions, like great night combat in southern France and some fights around the Siegfried Line.



Eagles Strike **will satisfy both board and miniature wargamers.**



This game reminds us that it usually fell to the infantry to do the hard fighting.

Eagles Strike's best element is its ability to remind gamers just how much of the fighting on the Western Front was done by foot-slogging GIs. Wargamers often gravitate toward armored formations, but *ES* reminds us that you don't have to have swarms of Shermans, Panthers, and Tigers to have a good time. The game really benefits from this focus.

The truth is, the *Squad Battles* series can continue forever, and I suspect that HPS will keep giving them to us as long as we want. If the quality of those games matches *Eagles Strike*, we're going to want them for years to come.

VERDICT ★★★★½
Should be under every wargamer's Christmas tree.

Iron Storm

The tedium of war **BY DI LUO**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: **DREAMCATCHER**
DEVELOPER: **4X STUDIO**
GENRE: **ACTION** ESRB RATING: **MATURE; BLOOD, GORE, AND VIOLENCE** PRICE: **$39.99**
REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM III 500, 128MB RAM, 700MB HARD DRIVE SPACE, 32MB 3D CARD**
RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **1GHZ CPU, 256MB RAM**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, INTERNET (2-16 PLAYERS)**

Playing through *Iron Storm* gave me a renewed appreciation for the men who endured years of drudgery in the muddy trenches of Flanders during the Great War. The hours spent with this alternate-history shooter have traumatized my eardrums, caused me to tear out my hair, and (worst of all) given me hours of boredom. If 30 hours of fiction was this bad, it's difficult to imagine the suffering of four years of lice, rats, gas, and shelling.

The setting of *Iron Storm* is its highlight. World War I in this alternate universe never ended, and the world is divided into two warring camps. Fifty years since the outbreak of war, Germany has been turned into a wasteland of burnt-out buildings and endless trenches. Although the graphics in *Iron Storm* aren't spectacular, they do a good job of creating an atmosphere of devastation and hopelessness in a world without peace.

The sound, when it works, also adds to the experience. Unfortunately, there's a horrible bug in systems using Sound Blaster Live and Windows XP. Explosions will cause ear-ringing crackles in the speakers and make all other sounds inaudible. Why the developers didn't rectify a conflict with two of the most common products on the market is a question for the ages. Crashes are also frequent, and people in *Iron Storm*'s support forums have reported problems with various videocards, mice, and attempts at remapping the controls.



Please shoot me so I don't have to play this anymore.

The gameplay itself isn't worth the headaches. The combat and weapons are standard fare, with sniping situations, melees in tight quarters, and occasional stints manning stationary turrets. Much of it feels derivative—almost a *Medal of Honor* lite, complete with a town of snipers, research base, and tank theft. Worse, there are stealth missions requiring you to sneak past enemies who are often omniscient and occasionally invincible. Unless you follow the exact path defined by the designers, you'll get spotted by the enemy even with their backs turned to you. Add that to vague mission objectives, snipers who never miss, as well as puzzle-like sequences, and you have a few hundred quick saves and loads ahead of you before you can get through the game.

Iron Storm isn't as bad as getting trench foot or being castrated by shrapnel, but it's still so full of tedium and frustration that paying for the game is pretty much an act of self-flagellation. Fans of alternate history are better off buying a few Turtledove novels.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆
Trench warfare might almost be preferable to playing this game.

The Italian Job

The closest the world may ever come to getting the Benny Hill game it deserves **BY ERIK WOLPAW**

GAME STATS

PUBLISHER: **GLOBALSTAR**
DEVELOPER: **SCI**
GENRE: **OBSCURE POP CULTURE REFERENCE RACING**
ESRB RATING: **TEEN; MILD VIOLENCE** PRICE: **$19.99**
REQUIREMENTS: **PENTIUM II 300, 64MB RAM** RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: **NONE**
MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **HOTSEAT (2-8 PLAYERS)**

In 1969, a British car-caper movie called *The Italian Job* starring Michael Caine and Benny Hill was released. There wasn't a whole lot of *Italian Job* news for the next 33 years, but then last summer an *Italian Job* racing-adventure game came out for PS1. Rather than wait another generation to cash in on other *Italian Job* merchandising opportunities, SCI took just six months to publish a PC conversion of the generally ignored PS1 game based on the largely forgotten film.

Like most PS1 conversions, *The Italian Job* doesn't look very good. Everything's blocky, the textures are all blurry, and the grainy horizon bitmap brings back memories of the first *Doom* demo. Even though it involves driving through a city while pursuing a life of crime, *The Italian Job* is no *Grand Theft Auto III*. It's basically 16 short driving challenges (which require no improvisation) that are connected by a thin plot. There're some extra modes available, but the driving model is so stiff that it's hard to imagine bothering to play them. However, it does feature an anonymous voice actor doing an honestly spectacular Michael Caine impersonation. SCI should keep him in mind if they decide to bankroll a Nintendo 64 version of *The Hand*.



I don't know exactly what "nicked" means, so I just assumed it meant "you lost," and I stopped playing.

SCI took just six months to publish a PC conversion of the generally ignored PS1 game.

VERDICT ★☆☆☆☆
Too little, too late.

REVIEWINDEX

CGW capsules of recent reviews. Game names in red indicate an Editor's Choice game.

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Age of Sail II: Privateer's Bounty	12/03	A game of great promise delivers mostly crushing disappointment	★★☆☆☆
Aliens vs. Predator 2: Primal Hunt	11/02	The add-on to last year's Action Game of the Year isn't worth the $20 price tag	★★½☆☆
America's Army: Operations	01/03	The U.S. Army makes a quality tactical shooter—and it's free	★★★★½
Batman: Vengeance	01/03	Frustrating controls, inconsistent gameplay, and killer bugs	★½☆☆☆
Battlefield 1942	01/03	Contender for multiplayer game of the year—a complete blast	★★★★½
Celtic Kings: Rage of War	11/02	Fine blend of strategy, combat, and role-playing, plus men in skirts	★★★★½
Chessmaster 9000	12/02	A good learning tool, but the tough A.I. is only suited for already strong players	★★★½☆
Divine Divinity	12/02	An old-fashioned RPG in both the best and the worst sense	★★★½☆
Duke Nukem: Manhattan Project	9/02	The only Duke game you'll see in your life is a pretty good side-scroller	★★★★☆
Earth 2150: Lost Souls	1/03	Earth 2150 redux all over again, only harder and undocumented	★★☆☆☆
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	8/02	The definitive, open-ended RPG epic	★★★★½
Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom	11/02	Impressions Software has just about perfected the historical city-builder	★★★½☆
Empire Earth: Art of Conquest	1/03	Unbalanced, too tough, and poorly designed	★★☆☆☆
F1 2002	10/02	Delivers authentic-yet-accessible racing enjoyment for all	★★★★½
Farscape: The Game	12/02	Won't even appeal to the show's deluded fans	★½☆☆☆
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	1/03	Top-notch mission pack makes a good game into an outstanding one	★★★★½
Grand Prix 4	12/02	An embarrassment of riches for F1 fans	★★★★½
Grand Theft Auto III	9/02	The poster child for all that's wrong in gaming is chock-full of all that's fun in gaming	★★★★★
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	1/03	An almost-perfect blend of action and stealth	★★★★½
Links 2003	1/03	Everything you'd expect from Links, plus a new, real-time mouse swing	★★★★☆
LOTR: The Fellowship of the Ring	1/03	Tom Bombadil and real-estate transactions in place of gameplay	★★☆☆☆
Madden NFL 2003	11/02	Finally as good as the console versions, this is a football classic	★★★★★
MechWarrior 4: Clan Mech Pak	12/02	Should have been a free download, not a $13 product	★★☆☆☆
MechWarrior 4: Inner Sphere Mech Pack	10/02	Should have been a free download, not a $13 product	★★☆☆☆
Medieval: Total War	12/02	The ultimate historical strategy game	★★★★★
Neverwinter Nights	9/02	Buy this one for the multiplayer and user-made mods	★★★★½
NOLF2	1/03	As funny and stylish as the original, and more fun to play, too	★★★★½
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	10/02	Features and content worthy of a brand-new game, this is a benchmark expansion	★★★★½
Prince of Qin	1/03	For every potentially cool element, a worse one awaits to ruin it	★½☆☆☆
Prisoner of War	1/03	More Hogan's Heroes than The Great Escape	★½☆☆☆
RollerCoaster Tycoon 2	1/03	Not the sweeping success of the original, but still more ups than downs	★★★½☆
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	9/02	Run-of-the-mill shooter with an offensive focus on violence	★★½☆☆
Stronghold: Crusader	1/03	Nowhere near as good as the original	★★☆☆☆
The Sum of All Fears	9/02	Not quite Rogue Spear, not even close to Counter-Strike	★★½☆☆
Syberia	10/02	The best new adventure game in years	★★★★☆
The Thing	11/02	Great game concept bogged down by glitches and annoyances	★★★☆☆
Unreal Tournament 2003	1/03	Gorgeous and polished up, but lacking revitalized gameplay	★★★★☆
Virtual Resort: Spring Break	1/03	Like spring break in Berlin—only worse	★½☆☆☆
WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos	9/02	A very good game that could have used less game design and more excitement	★★★★☆

CGW RECOMMENDS



Age of Mythology ★★★★★

We've had this game for less time than we've had *WarCraft III*, and already we've played more multiplayer games of it than Blizzard's game. The powerful new myth units and battle-shifting god powers add a new layer of strategy and a lot of new life to the tried-and-true Ensemble Studios *Age* formula.



Mafia ★★★★★

We've taken more flack from readers over our *Mafia* review than any game in recent memory. It's understandable. This is a game that has a great story, some very cool missions, and an incredible cinematic feel—but it's also got some pretty dull stretches of just driving around, and the lack of an in-mission save can be really frustrating at times. That said, if you've got the patience for it (and it seems tons of you do) this is one of the most stylish action games in years.

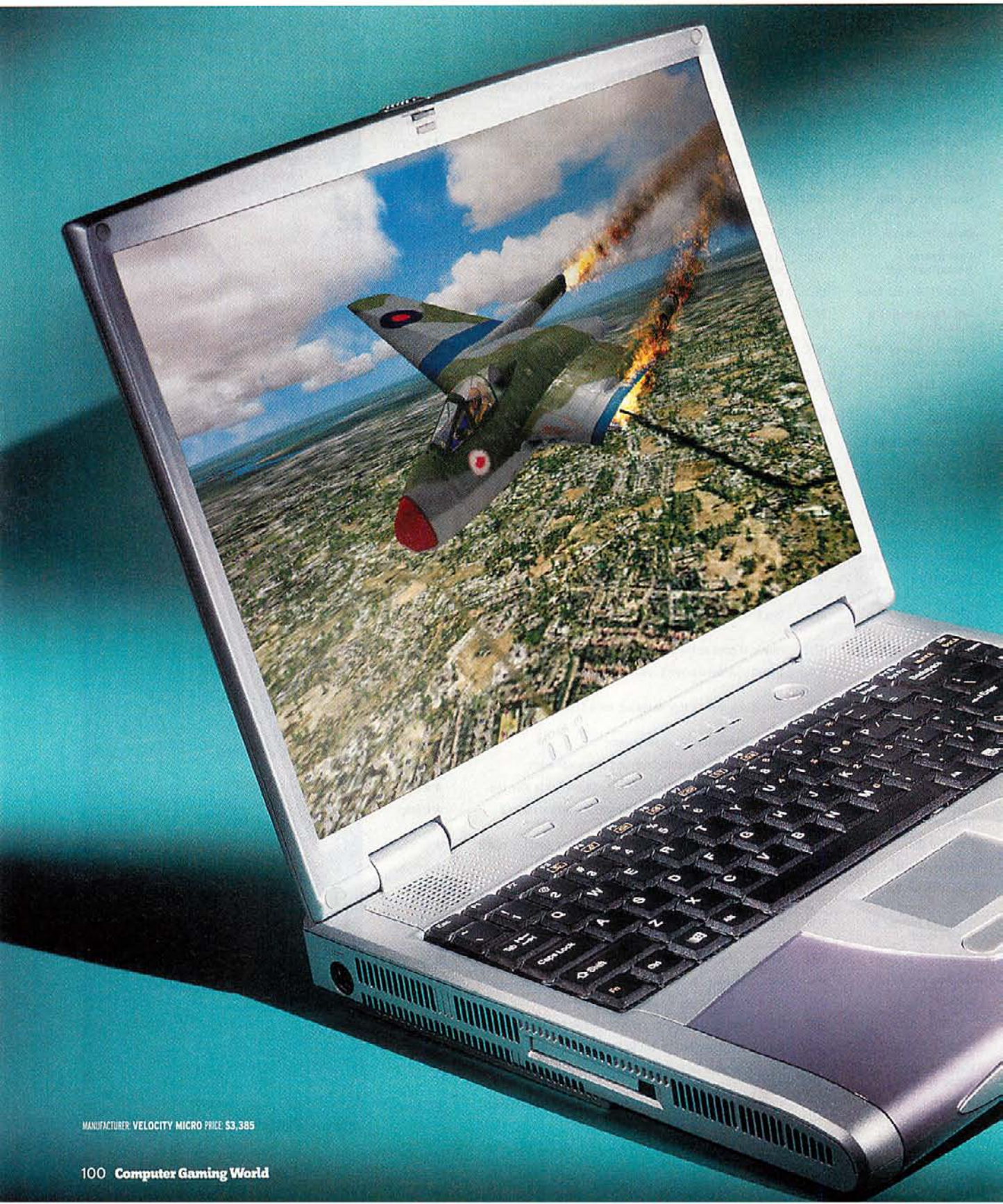


Icewind Dale II ★★★★½

While we're as guilty as the rest of the gaming media for focusing on high-profile RPGs *Morrowind* and *Neverwinter Nights*, the sword-and-sorcery title that's won our hearts is *Icewind Dale II*. This party-based dungeon crawl does the best job of implementing Third Edition rules, and its wild and woolly non-stop battles are a tour de force of tactical combat.

Tech

The best ways to part with your hard-earned money **Edited by William O'Neal**



MANUFACTURER: **VELOCITY MICRO** PRICE: **$3,385**

Hot and Heavy

Hefty 2.8GHz Velocity Micro notebook can handle just about anything

Ten pounds is damn heavy for a notebook, but it's a heck of a lot lighter than trying to drag your desktop out the door. That's the kind of logic you've gotta have when buying Velocity Micro's NoteMagix. While this notebook has some serious horsepower (a 2.8GHz Intel "desktop" Pentium 4 CPU), it's slightly more portable than an anchor (9.94 pounds without the AC adapter). The thing is, this is the kind of machine you're gonna need if you want to play games on the go.



By Darren Gladstone Photography by Arnold Tiosejo

By the Numbers

MANUFACTURER	Velocity Micro	Dell
Model	NoteMagix S56	Dell Inspiron 8200
Price	$3,385	$3,699
Operating system	Windows XP Professional Edition	Windows XP Home Edition
Processor (CPU)	2.8GHz Intel (Desktop) Pentium 4 w/ 533MHz FSB	2.2GHz Intel Mobile Pentium 4
Memory	1GB PC-2100 DDR-RAM	512MB DDR-RAM
Hard drive	40GB 5400 RPM ATA/100	60GB 5400 RPM ATA/100
Graphics processor	64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9000	64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9000
DVD-ROM drive	8x DVD 16/10/24 CD-RW combo drive	8x DVD 16/10/24 CD-RW combo drive
CD-ROM drive	24x CD-ROM drive	N/A
Display	15" UVGA Active Matrix TFT LCD	15" UXGA Active Matrix TFT LCD
Pointing device	TouchPad	Pointing stick; TouchPad
Miscellany	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0 mouse; 56 V.92 modem; 10/100Mbps ethernet adapter; 4 USB 2.0 ports; FireWire port; SPDIF out	2nd battery; TrueMobile WLAN wireless LAN; IEEE 1394; 2 USB ports
Display driver	6.13.10.6178	6.13.10.6162
BENCHMARKS		
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	7072	6999
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	2350	2529
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32; no FSAA)	3887	4002
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	2320	2548
3D GameGauge 3.0 (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	52	46
3D GameGauge 3.0 (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	22	46
3D GameGauge 3.0 (1600x1200x32; no FSAA)	29	30
3D GameGauge 3.0 (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	24	29
Quake III: Arena (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	24.9	125.5
Quake III: Arena (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	60.3	54.8
Comanche 4 (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	32.85	33.17
Comanche 4 (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	14.81	21.95
Serious Sam: TSE (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	16.5	57.2
Serious Sam: TSE (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	31.4	32.9
Jedi Knight II (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	107.9	92.4
Jedi Knight II (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	24.6	92.6
Jedi Knight II (1600x1200x32; no FSAA)	56.1	52.9
Jedi Knight II (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	56.1	52.8
Dungeon Siege (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	41.22	43.92
Dungeon Siege (1600x1200x32; no FSAA)	53.6	34.77
Dungeon Siege (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	35.39	34.98
IL-2 Sturmovik (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	13.166	53.715
IL-2 Sturmovik (1600x1200x32; no FSAA)	28.663	39.378
IL-2 Sturmovik (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	29.275	33.892
NASCAR 2002 (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	16.877	30.592
NASCAR 2002 (1600x1200x32; no FSAA)	24.465	21
NASCAR 2002 (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	13.652	21
Unreal Tournament 2003 (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	32.263	34.724
Unreal Tournament 2003 (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	19.604	35.544
Unreal Tournament 2003 (1600x1200x32; no FSAA)	17.183	18.819
Unreal Tournament 2003 (1600x1200x32; 4x FSAA)	13.266	19.408

*3D GAMEGAUGE 3.0 AVERAGES THE FRAMERATES OF THE FOLLOWING GAMES: COMANCHE 4, DUNGEON SIEGE, IL-2 STURMOVIK, JEDI KNIGHT II, NASCAR 2002, SERIOUS SAM: TSE.

Boasting 1GB of DDR-RAM and ATI's 64MB Radeon Mobility 9000 (M9) graphics chip, this is one hot little gaming machine. In benchmark tests, it scored just about on par with the other Radeon 9000, and even faster than GeForce4 440 Go-equipped notebooks. However, we did come across some unusual results in several 4x FSAA (Full Screen Anti-Aliasing) tests. Take, for example, *Quake III: Arena*. At 1024x768x32 with 4x FSAA turned on, the NoteMagix scored an abysmal 24.9fps! A similarly stacked Dell Inspiron 8200 with the new Radeon chip scored a seemingly impressive 125.5fps in the same trial. What we realized is that the Inspiron uses an older ATI driver (v. 6.13.10.6162), which simply turned FSAA off when it suspected the card was being asked to do more than it was comfortable with. The Velocity Micro shipped with a newer driver (v. 6.13.10.6178) that runs at 1024x768x32 with 4x FSAA turned on. At 1600x1200x32, the Velocity Micro—similar to the Inspiron—simply turned FSAA off, and the machine seemed to perform rather well. What this tells us is that you can expect pretty good gaming performance with this machine—if you leave 4x FSAA off.

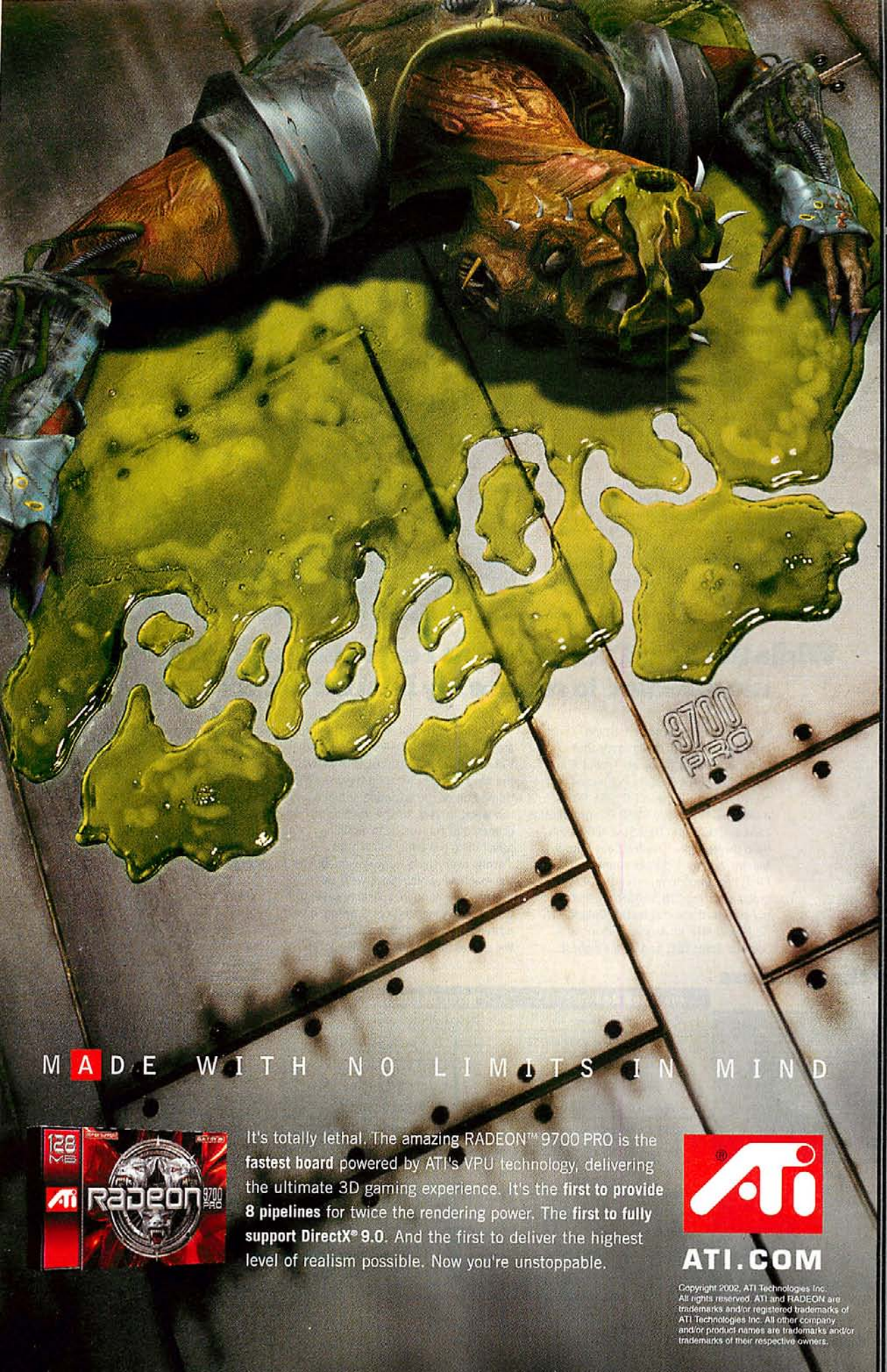
With all this hardcore hardware, you

This machine gets hotter than a stripper in Chernobyl.

can expect a notebook to heat up a little. But jeez, this sucker gets hotter than a stripper in Chernobyl. When I burned my fingers on the keyboard playing *UT2003*, I thought to myself, "I remember having the same problems with Alienware's Area-51m notebook." You see, Velocity Micro's NoteMagix may not have the cool logo or funky colors of Alienware's Area-51m notebook line, but I'll be damned if this ain't the same computer. The biggest difference I could spot: the price tag. When I configured identical systems on each company's site, Velocity Micro's powerhouse portable costs more than $600 less! So, even if it lacks the panache and support of Alienware, you're still getting a solid machine for your gaming ducats. But you'll definitely want to invest extra money in an external keyboard—or a set of oven mitts.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

It looks like an Area-51m, it handles like an Area-51m, but it lacks the slick logo and hefty price tag.



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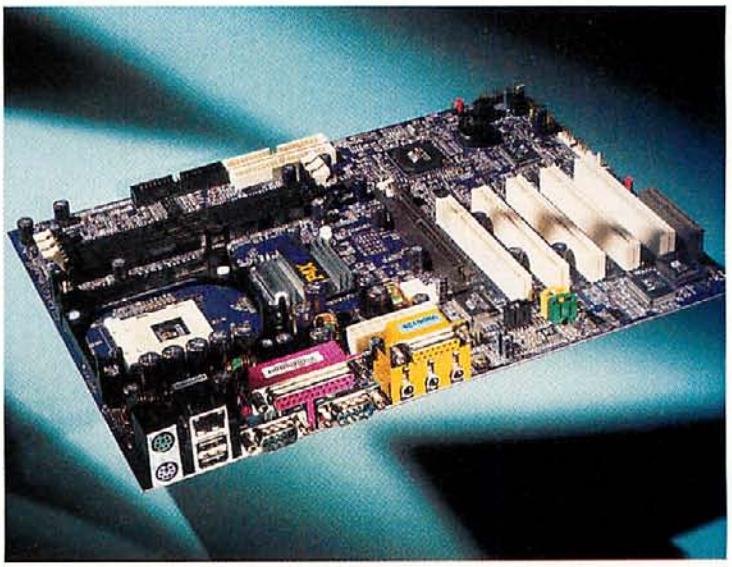
No Silver Bullet

The VIA P4PB 400-FL is about as versatile as any gamer would want **BY WILLIAM O'NEAL**

TECH STATS
MANUFACTURER: VIA
PRICE: $150

When I first got my hands on VIA's P4PB 400-L motherboard, I was genuinely excited. While VIA has taken heat in the past for building slower Pentium-based motherboards than their Intel counterparts, I was willing to forgive a few extra frames per second in exchange for all the extras the P4PB 400-FL promised. But, while the board performed pretty much as I expected, several hangs made me reluctant to replace my Intel D850EMV2 with the VIA.

What initially impressed me about the P4PB 400-FL were the included extras: onboard 5.1 audio, multiple USB 2.0 ports, and IEEE 1394 FireWire ports, to name a few. I also like the fact that it supports DDR memory as opposed to RDRAM. However, because my other Pentium rig is RDRAM-based, I couldn't do a complete apples-to-apples comparison. Instead, I compared it with



While the board performed as I expected, several hangs made me reluctant to replace my Intel D850EMV2 with the VIA.

something close (and something I thought might actually favor the VIA motherboard): my old Power Rig, equipped with a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 beast, 1GB of Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM, a 128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro graphics card, a 120GB IBM DeskStar 7200rpm hard drive, and a CreativeLabs Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer soundcard. First, I dropped in an Intel D850EMV2 mobo sporting 1GB of RDRAM, and ran my standard suite of tests–3DMark2001 SE Pro, *Quake III: Arena*, *Comanche 4*, *Serious Sam: TSE*, and *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast*. Then, I replaced the Intel mobo with the VIA P4PB 400-FL and 1GB of Corsair PC-3200 DDR-RAM, wiped the hard drive, reinstalled Windows XP Home Edition, downloaded and installed the latest drivers for the VIA board, and prepared to run the tests again by reinstalling the benchmark apps.

While everything went reasonably OK, the machine–which has always been pretty solid–hung inexplicably several times during installation. Granted, it was nothing a simple reboot didn't fix, and the games all ran just fine, but hangs make me nervous and erode my confidence in a machine.

In terms of performance, the P4PB 400-FL-equipped machine was a tad slower than the same machine with the Intel motherboard. With the VIA board, the rig scored 14788 in 3DMark2001 SE at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off, compared to the 15140 the machine scored with the Intel motherboard. Scores in *Quake III: Arena* at 1024x768x32 with FSAA turned off were about the same (280), though the VIA was about 8 frames per second slower with 4x FSAA turned on. The *Comanche 4* and *Serious Sam: TSE* tests also yielded similar scores for both motherboards, while the Intel motherboard soundly dominated the *Jedi Knight II* tests.

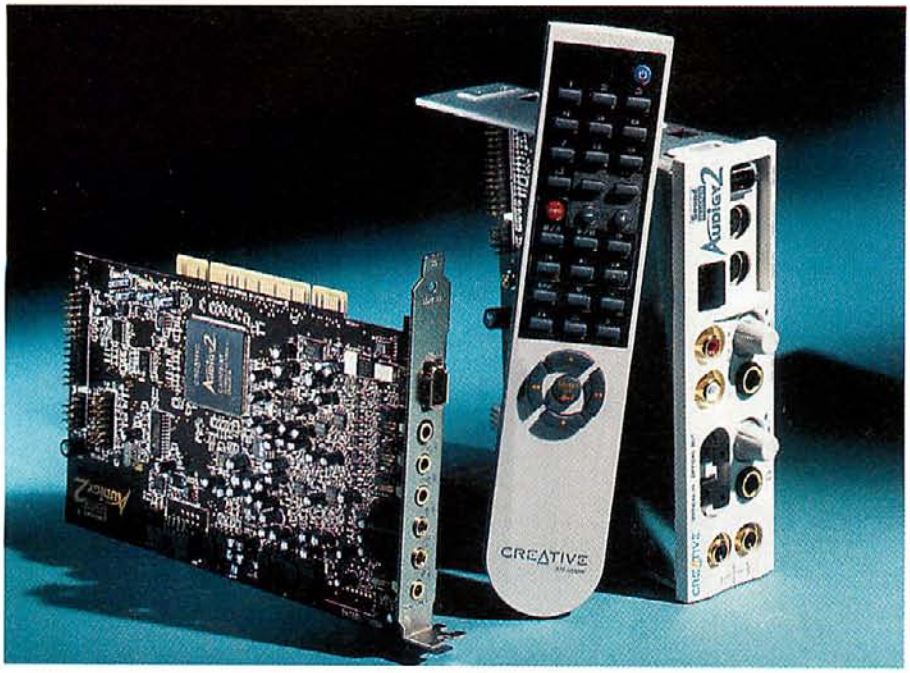
I'll probably be leaving my Intel board in my old machine. But if you're a DDR nut, generally have a hard-on for the VIA chipset, don't mind dropping a few frames per second, or want a motherboard that's more versatile than Intel's, check out the P4PB 400-FL.

By the Numbers

MOTHERBOARD	VIA P4PB 400-FL	INTEL D850EMV2
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition
Processor (CPU)	2.8GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB	2.8GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB
Motherboard	VIA P4PB 400-FL	Intel D850EMV2
Memory	1GB Corsair PC-3200 DDR-RAM	1GB Kingston PC-1066 RDRAM
Hard drive	120GB IBM DeskStar 7200rpm	120GB IBM DeskStar 7200rpm
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy X-Gamer
BENCHMARKS		
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	14788	15140
3DMark2001 SE Pro (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	10855	10922
Jedi Knight II (1024x768x32; no FSAA)	119	129
Jedi Knight II (1024x768x32; 4x FSAA)	119	129

VERDICT ★★★½☆

VIA's P4PB 400 series motherboards boast everything you think you'll need–with the exception of brute force.



Too Little Too Soon?

The Audigy 2 is everything you need—and don't BY T. BYRL BAKER

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER: CREATIVE LABS
PRICE: $200 (AUDIGY 2 PLATINUM), $130 (AUDIGY 2) REQUIREMENTS: PENTIUM II, 128MB RAM, 600MB HARD DRIVE SPACE RECOMMENDED REQUIREMENTS: 6.1 SPEAKERS

Going from the Audigy to the Audigy 2 is a lot like upgrading from a Sound Blaster Live to a Live 5.1. If you have speakers good enough (and numerous enough) to take advantage of the card's minor changes, you'll notice that a few games take advantage of the Audigy 2's capabilities. But, for the most part, it's musicians who'll benefit from the extra fidelity.

The card's support for a 6.1 speaker arrangement is outstanding; positional audio using an Audigy 2 coupled with Creative's Inspire 6.1 6600s was the most accurate we've heard yet from a relatively inexpensive consumer setup. This was especially true in games like *Hitman 2* (included as part of the generous software bundle) that support EAX Advanced HD. Screaming armies and beating horse hooves shifted smoothly from front to rear as we panned the camera in *Medieval: Total War*. And the whoosh of rockets passing behind us from left to right let us pinpoint enemies more accurately in *Battlefield 1942*.

The card also works much better under Windows XP than the Sound Blaster Live does, but that's due more to a driver problem with the Live than anything else. The Platinum version we tested comes with a 5.25-inch internal drive studded with ports and knobs, including a headphone jack, volume control, FireWire port, and an infrared receiver for the included remote control. Be aware: There are so many jacks on the card itself that the included joystick/MIDI port has a separate metal plate that will take up an extra PCI slot.

If you're a gamer with an Audigy but no 6.1 speaker system, there's little reason to jump up to an Audigy 2. If you watch lots of DVDs, want to listen to DVDAudio, or are considering a 6.1 speaker system, the Audigy 2 is worth the extra cash.

Positional audio using an Audigy 2 was the most accurate we've heard yet from a relatively inexpensive consumer setup.

VERDICT ★★★★½

Barely qualifies as evolutionary, but still a damn fine audiocard.



WIL POWER

By William O'Neal

Hardware Beats Software

Back when I was a lowly quality assurance tester for a little-known software company called Geoworks, my coworkers and I found leaked screenshots of the as-yet-unreleased Id title, *Quake*, and were blown away. We were happily surfing the Internet on monochrome Sparc stations when someone told us he had heard that in order to play *Quake*, you absolutely had to have a Pentium-based machine. We all decided right then and there that we'd be buying Pentiums. The software actually pushed the hardware. And I don't mean that a faster machine meant playing *Quake* at 30fps as opposed to 20; the game actually looked noticeably better.

We're in an entirely different situation these days, a situation that Hector Ruiz, president and chief executive officer of AMD, articulated quite well in his Comdex 2002 keynote address: "I urge you to demand that those companies who are currently serving you today begin developing technology not for its own sake. Not in isolation from the real world. But in line with what you are really trying to do....People have to be able to do something a whole heck of a lot better than they did before. It's time to do a reset around the customer."

While we all know what his comments are about, Intel has soundly kicked AMD's ass by doing the opposite: creating superfast CPUs that, for all intents and purposes are designed to be as fast as they can be, not to serve any particular software. There aren't many reasons beyond 3DMark2001 bragging rights to run out and get the fastest CPUs and/or graphics cards. Ninety percent of all PC games out there will run just fine on an Athlon XP 2400+ with 512MB of RAM and a 128MB GeForce4 Ti 4200, a fact born out by sagging PC sales.

Now that Nvidia has announced the GeForce FX (codenamed NV30), let's cross our fingers and hope that game developers give us compelling reasons to save our pennies.



In the Rear With the Gear

The Creative Inspire 6.1 6600 speaker set has your back **BY T. BYRL BAKER**

TECH STATS

MANUFACTURER: CREATIVE LABS
PRICE: $130
REQUIREMENTS: 5.1 OR 6.1 SOUNDCARD

Creative Labs' Inspire 6.1 6600 proves that when it comes to gaming, you can't necessarily judge a speaker system by its spec sheet. Yeah, the subwoofer bottoms out at the very point good subs are just starting to rumble. And yeah, the puny satellites support just 8 watts apiece (20 watts in the front center speaker). But when you consider that there are six little satellites pumping out some of the most accurate positional audio on the block, this relatively inexpensive 6.1 setup suddenly sounds a lot better than, well, it sounds.

It should come as no surprise to any of our readers that a 6.1 system at this price point is going to have some drawbacks, and to that end, the Inspire 6.1 has several. For some reason, Creative Labs designed the Inspire 6.1 6600s such that the speaker cables are fused on. Because of this design decision, there's no easy way to extend the cables. Furthermore, while the bass response is loud, it's not particularly accurate. And that's not the end of it; compared to high-end computer speakers like the Cambridge SoundWorks MegaWorks 510Ds or Klipsch ProMedia 5.1s, the overall fidelity of the satellites is relatively low. Compared to our Klipsch reference speakers, the Inspire 6.1 6600s delivered music that sounded muddier and game audio that had lost its crispness. And since the Inspires 6.1 6600s are analog speakers, you can forget about using them with your fancy digital outputs.

Despite these faults, the Inspire 6.1 is a solid system for the money as far as gaming and watching DVDs are concerned. The rear center speaker, which is the 6.1's most appealing characteristic, is just as effective as a front center speaker for letting sound realistically swirl around your head. The addition of the rear center speaker makes it easier than ever to track enemies in 3D games using EAX Advanced HD, or to immerse yourself in DVDs with Dolby Digital EX sound tracks. The system also comes with a small control unit that includes a bass control on one side, a volume control and power switch on the other side, and a headphone jack built into its end.

For the money, the Inspire 6.1 6600s work well when coupled with an Audigy 2 card that natively supports all six speakers. But if audio quality and volume are of paramount importance, a more expensive 4.1 or 5.1 setup'll better serve you. If all you care about is positional accuracy, these speakers are worth a listen.

A 6.1 system at this price point is going to have some drawbacks.

VERDICT ★★★★☆
True surround sound on a budget.

"Move, B****, Get Out the Way!"

Logitech's MOMO Racing Force Feedback Wheel is a great wheel at an affordable price **BY WILLIAM O'NEAL**



TECH STATS
MANUFACTURER: LOGITECH
PRICE: $100

Logitech's MOMO Racing Force Feedback Wheel is the low-end version of last year's $200 Logitech MOMO Force Wheel. But that's all relative. While this wheel isn't as swank as the red, leather-clad, brushed-aluminum MOMO Force Wheel, it's still super sweet and $100 cheaper. The wheel itself is fully rubberized and thicker than the MOMO Force. It sports an F1-style sequential shifter, as well as two paddle shifters. The gas and brake pedals are attached to a solid base and feature what Logitech calls "a unique carpet grip system," which is, in essence, a little spike-studded foot that prevents the base from slipping on carpets. (The foot can be folded into the base if you're not using the wheel on carpet.) During rousing sessions of EA Sports' *F1 Racing*, the base never moved.

The wheel has six programmable buttons, which is great if you have a specific setup for your driving system. We also liked the triple clamping system, 'cause nothing's worse than yanking the wheel off the desk in the middle of a heated race.



What really make Logitech wheels stand out are their force feedback effects. While other wheels attempt to mimic the feel of driving on specific surfaces (like cobblestone, gravel, or sand) in unsubtle ways, the Logitech wheels simply add different levels of resistance. The effect helps create resistance that makes it easier to control vehicles on various surfaces.

If you were excited about last year's MOMO Force Wheel, but the idea of dropping $200 was too much for the wife to stomach, then the Logitech MOMO Racing Wheel, at only $100, is a significantly easier pill to swallow. And, you didn't hear this from us, but seeing that it's USB, we think it may even work with some PS2 games.

VERDICT ★★★★½

If you enjoy racing games, you'll love this wheel.

Meet Robo-Stick

Saitek Cyborg 3D Rumble Force offers force feedback for less **BY RAPHAEL LIBERATORE**

TECH STATS
MANUFACTURER: SAITEK INDUSTRIES
PRICE: $60
REQUIREMENTS: USB PORT

Saitek really knows game controllers; its Cyborg line of USB joysticks is known for quality at a great price. When it comes to meeting that standard, the Cyborg 3D Rumble Force Stick is no exception.

A tad larger than its predecessors, the Cyborg 3D is an ambidextrous stick, built for comfort during long hours of gameplay. Packed with nine ergonomically placed buttons (eight of which are programmable), a rapid-fire trigger, rudder twist, dual-handle throttle, four fire buttons, eight-way POV hat switch, and LED displays, this is one multi-purpose stick. Driver setup is simple using Saitek's new Smart Technology control-panel software. Configuring custom settings and modifying profiles has never been easier.



The Cyborg's force-feedback motors are driven by Immersion's TouchSence technology; effects feel smooth and precise. In both *IL-2 Sturmovik* and *MechWarrior 4*, the Cyborg performed as well as the higher-priced Microsoft Sidewinder. In one combat-heavy *MechWarrior* scenario, the rumble effects, though somewhat choppy, made the high-intensity action feel authentic and fluid. If you want a good force feedback joystick for less than $100, look no further.

VERDICT ★★★★☆

An excellent marriage of design, ergonomics, force feedback, and budget.

How To Set Up a Dual-Boot Config

Enjoy the best of both worlds with an option to boot to Win 98 or XP **By T. Byrl Baker**

Windows XP is a great all-purpose OS, but many legacy titles (especially Glide-related stuff) from the '90s won't run under it without patches—and even then, in many cases, it's easier to just use Win 98. *Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed*, for example, won't work with XP unless you remove a file called GIMME.DLL or download a patch from Microsoft that changes the way SafeDisk gets handled.

A good way to get around this is to simply create a dual-boot configuration. You'll be equipped for 98 or XP use and reap the added benefit of better DOS support under Win 98. (To check a game's compatibility with XP, check the list at www.ntcompatible.com/compat.php?cat=games&sort=WindowsXP&idx=0.)

The easiest way to set up a dual boot is with commercial software like Vcom's *System Commander 7* (www.v-com.com), or the free, open-source *XOSL* (www.xosl.org). But the most reliable method is to manually configure your rig with fdisk.

Unlike 98 and Me, XP does not need to be installed on a machine's primary partition. If you want to add XP to a drive on which 98 SE is already installed, simply create an extended partition and logical drive, and install XP there. Or, you can install a second hard drive and put XP on it. Format using FAT32 if you want access to the XP partition when 98 SE is loaded.

This article assumes you have one hard drive with one large primary partition, and that you want to do fresh installations of 98 SE and Win XP. Obviously, you'll need the software for both operating systems in order to do the installation.



STEP #1

CREATE A STARTUP DISK

Download a Win 98 SE startup disk from www.bootdisk.com, and extract the contents to a floppy disk. Back up all your important data, since partitioning using fdisk requires reformatting the drive.



STEP #2

NIX THAT OLD PARTITION

Reboot the system with the floppy diskette in the drive and select Minimal Boot from the menu. Type "fdisk" at the prompt, and when asked if you want to enable large disk support, press "Y." Now, delete the existing partition by selecting Option 3 (Delete partition), then selecting Option 1 (Delete primary DOS partition). When asked what partition to delete, type "1" and enter the volume label for the drive, which is listed near the top of the screen. When asked for confirmation, press "Y" and then press Esc to continue.

STEP #3

HIT IT AND SPLIT IT! Now it's time to set up the new partitions. Choose Option 1 (Create DOS partition). Choose Option 1 again on the next menu (Create primary DOS partition). When asked if you want to use maximum available space for the partition, press "N" and wait for a bit. Then, enter the partition size (in megabytes) you want to devote to 98 SE—the total hard-drive space is listed by default. Whatever you don't allocate to SE will go to your XP logical drive. Press Esc when finished; this returns you to the Main menu.

STEP #4

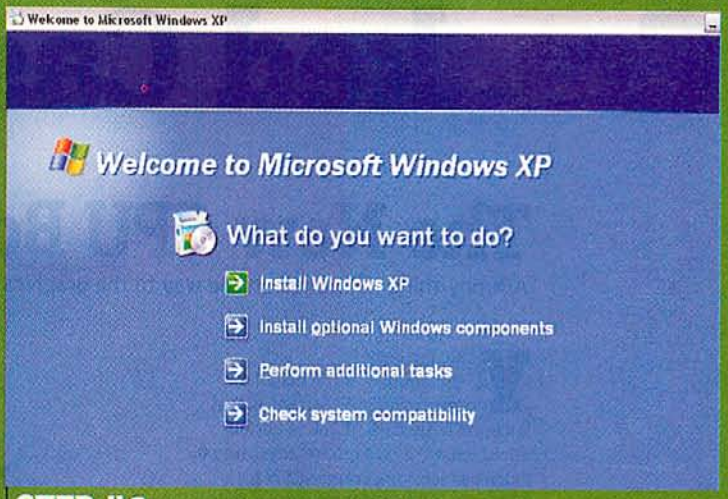
WHEW, YOU'VE MADE IT THIS FAR! Select Option 1, then Option 2 (Create extended DOS partition). When asked to enter the partition size, leave the default value; this will use up the remainder of the drive. Press Esc and wait. When asked to enter a logical drive size, again leave the default value. Press Esc, then select Option 2 (Set active partition). When asked what partition to make active, type "1". Press Esc, exit fdisk, and restart the computer using the Minimal Boot option.

uration



STEP #5

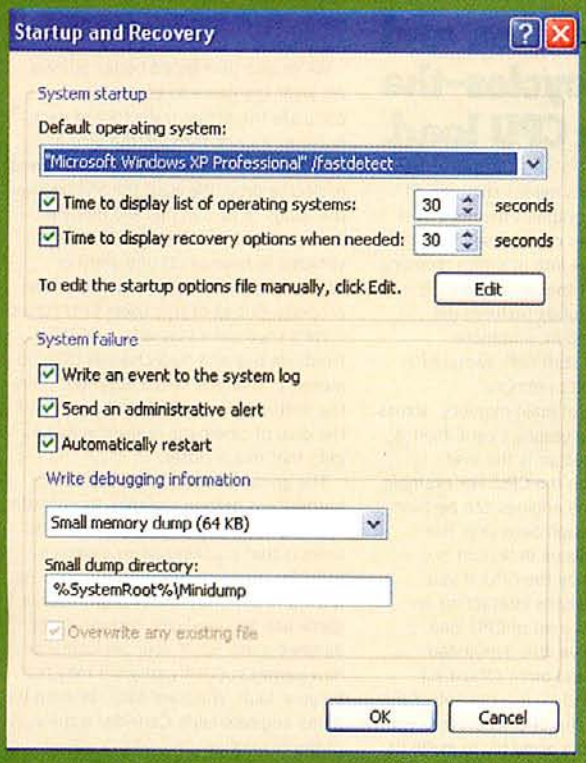
FORMAT THE HARD DRIVES At the A: prompt, type "format C:" Wait until the format is finished, then repeat the process to format the other logical drive (D:, unless a different drive letter was assigned during partition creation). Insert your Win 98 SE installation CD and reboot the computer. Select Option 2 at the Boot menu to start with CD-ROM support. Switch to the CD-ROM drive at the DOS prompt, type "Setup," and install 98 SE.



STEP #6

INSTALL THE OSES When installing multiple Microsoft operating systems, always work your way from the oldest to the newest. Depending on the OSes you want to install, DOS comes first, followed by 95/95 OSR2, 98/98 SE, Me, Win2K, and finally, XP. You can't use 95 and 98 (or 95 and Me) together in a multiboot configuration.

In this case, first install 98 SE on the primary partition, then install XP on a different partition. To install XP, boot into 98 SE, insert the XP installation CD and click Install Windows XP (it should appear on the Autorun menu). From the Installation Type pull-menu, select "New Installation (Advanced)" and follow the prompts. After you enter a product key, you'll see a dialog box with an Advanced Options button. Click it, and then check the "I want to choose the install drive letter and partition during setup" box, and the "Copy all installation files from the Setup CD" box (if you have enough hard drive space). Follow the prompts again, and when XP setup runs, use the arrow keys to select the logical drive (D: or whatever other letter was assigned) as the installation drive. At the next menu, select "Leave the current file system intact" and then install XP normally.



STEP #7

CHOOSE YOUR DEFAULT OS

Now, you can set the default operating system to avoid manually choosing an OS each time the computer boots. Load XP, click Start, right-click My Computer, and select Properties. Choose the Advanced tab; in the Startup and Recovery box, click the Settings button. Now, you can use the dropdown Default Operating System menu to select 98 SE or XP, and use the settings beneath it to determine how long the Boot menu stays onscreen before the default OS loads.



STEP #8

INSTALL YOUR SOFTWARE

Install your hardware drivers, games, and other applications. You'll need to do separate installations for each operating system, so dual-boot configurations always eat up more hard-drive space than a single-OS setup.

Cracked Case

The New CPU Bottleneck

A funny thing happened on the way to the graphics revolution **By Loyd Case**



Yeah, I'm back.

OK, enough of the maudlin reminiscing. All I can say is that it's good to be back. If you're curious about what I'm up to these days, drop by ExtremeTech.com. Former *CGW* tech editor Dave Salvator's there, too, and we cover the gamut of PC hardware in great depth for PC enthusiasts. We assume that includes you. Now that I've gotten my shameless plug out of the way, let's talk about graphics.

There's a lot of noise about the cool, new graphics hardware coming out. Headlines appear daily on the Web and in magazines, touting the features DirectX 9 will bring to the table. ATI has had the Radeon 9700 Pro out for several months, and Nvidia's GeForce FX is set to ship in February. When you think about it, the graphics battle is in many ways more intense than the CPU battle. Compare the more than 100 million transistors in the Radeon 9700 Pro to the 55 million and 38 million transistors that the Pentium 4 Northwood core and AMD Athlon XP boast, respectively. It makes the gate count of these graphics chips seem a bit excessive. Still, they are solving complex problems, so all those transistors are pretty busy most of the time. Which begs the question, "Why does my game performance suck?"

As gamers, we demand better, smarter, and more robust A.I. A.I. takes CPU cycles–the better the A.I., the heavier the CPU load.

The dirty little secret is this: As game developers have improved graphics by taking greater advantage of programmable shaders; hardware transform and lighting; and large, gorgeous textures, the bottleneck has moved. The problem now lies in two areas: PC memory bandwidth and your CPU.

"Wait a minute!" I hear you crying. "I just spent my kid's college fund on a 3GHz processor and a gigabyte of RAM. My graphics card has 128MB of RAM! What the heck are you talking about?"

What I'm talking about is that all those triangles and textures have to get to the graphics card. This means shipping all that data to the graphics memory over the AGP bus. Even compressed textures take time to move into graphics memory, although most of that occurs during level load time. But as textures get bigger, more complex, and more numerous, more stuff gets swapped in and out of graphics memory.

Bandwidth out of main memory, across AGP, and into the graphics card itself is one problem. Another is the ever-increasing load on the CPU. For example, some newer game engines can perform per-polygon collision detection. But guess what? Collision detection is actually handled by the CPU. If you have a lot of polygons interacting on the screen, that's a lot of CPU load.

As gamers, we've also demanded better, smarter, and more robust A.I. A.I. also takes CPU cycles–the better the A.I., the heavier the CPU load. Have you ever watched a big army try to make its way through complex terrain in a game like *Medieval: Total War*? It's a wonder pathfinding is as good as it is.

We've also demanded better physics. We want the game to accurately calculate the actual trajectory of each bullet or missile through the virtual world, taking into account wind drift and projectile drop. We want the airflow over the wings to be dynamically modeled. We want enemies to fall realistically, vehicles to bounce off one another accurately, and sheet metal to crumple properly. But all of this takes CPU cycles.

We'll soon see CPUs with a 667MHz frontside bus and dual-channel DDR333 memory. That will help a little–but then, the bottleneck may just shift again. Still, the goal of cinematic realism in games gets that much closer.

The good news in all this is that PC hardware is getting cheaper, so upgrades aren't quite as painful. The other good news is that cranking down a game's graphics quality isn't quite as painful as it used to be. Even midlevel graphics in a game like *No One Lives Forever 2* look damned good. So, if your performance in new games suddenly sucks, it may not be your fault, Windows' fault, or even the game engine's fault. Consider it the cost of the revolution.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL SLACK

Tech Medics

You have questions, we have worthless opinions **By William O'Neal**

Time for a motherboard upgrade

My computer is only about two years old, but I'm wondering what I should do to it so I can play the latest games. I've been thinking about getting an Athlon XP in the 2GHz-or-more range and getting a new motherboard. My parents won't buy me a new computer, and everything in my current one seems fine except for the motherboard and 833MHz Pentium III CPU. What should I get?

Melvin

I see no reason why you wouldn't be pleased with a 2GHz Athlon XP. Also, try to get your hands on ABIT's AT7-MAX2 KT400 motherboard. While it has no legacy ports (serial or parallel), it's a solid unit and its performance is top notch.

Which videocard should I buy?

Should I get a 128MB ATI Radeon 9000 Pro or a different videocard in the same performance and/or price range?

Sean

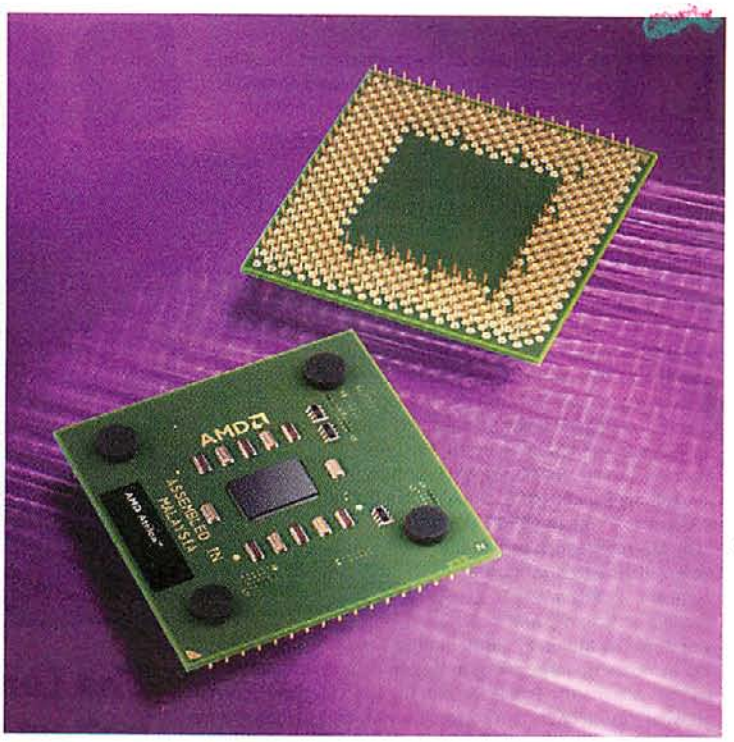
Get the Radeon.

To Pricewatch or not to Pricewatch

I am getting ready to build another gaming rig. Basically, I want to know where you get your equipment. Pricewatch.com lists some items I want, but some things, like Kingston RDRAM, I can't find listed there. Is there an easy way to get all this stuff piecemeal? Or do you know of any good sites that sell more or less everything I need, so I can avoid a bunch of shipping and handling charges? One other question: I am looking for a good flatscreen monitor, between 17 and 19 inches (I can't fit anything bigger in the available space). Any suggestions?

Jay

This is exactly why people buy pre-built computers. The problem with a site like Pricewatch.com is that they link to a bunch of other e-tailers, so you invariably encounter the situation in which you're waiting for 10 packages from 10 different places to show up before you can build your rig. For the sake of keeping things simple, you may want to go to a place like Bestbuy.com or CDW.com and order as many products as you can from one place. You may not get them at the lowest prices, but you'll save money on shipping and handling, and it'll be less stressful. As for a good flat-screen, while I haven't played with it myself, I've heard good things about Hitachi's 17-inch CML174. I should be reviewing one soon, so check back.



"When I play games, they're very laggy and choppy."

It's all about that AGP

I'm planning to get a GeForce3 Ti 200. Can my AMD Athlon Thunderbird 700MHz on an ASUS A7V handle it?

Peegee

The A7V has an AGP slot, so I see no reason why the GeForce3 Ti 200 wouldn't work.

Time for an upgrade, Josh

I have a Dell Inspiron 4100 laptop with 256MB of RAM and a 16MB ATI Mobility Radeon videocard. When I play games, they're very laggy and choppy. I tried lowering the settings, but it doesn't help.

Josh

In the words of my Scottish friend George Jones, "You're right fooked, lad!" I'm not sure when you got that laptop, but it may be that that graphics card can be replaced with a newer one like a 64MB GeForce4 4O Go. I'd call Dell and ask them about it. I know the GPUs in those laptops are socketed, so in theory, it should be replaceable. Unfortunately, Dell might charge so much to do it that you may be better off replacing the notebook altogether.

Wal-Mart can kiss my rear

Hey, *CGW*! Have you heard of Lindows? It's a new OS made by Linux. It is much better than Windows. It is like Mac OS, but made for people who prefer Windows, although it is not fully Windows compatible. And it is only $29.

Marquis

Yeah, I've heard of Lindows. I've also heard of Linux. Rather than buy a Lindows PC from Wal-Mart, go to Redhat.com and buy a real version of Linux. Of course, you won't be playing too many games on it.

Killer Rigs

The best recipe for building the ultimate gaming system

By William O'Neal

With the exception of the motherboard, choosing components for the Power Rig was a no-brainer. I was tempted by Asus' P4PE but decided to forgo the speed boost that the Asus would give me for the stability that the Intel D850EMVR offers: I've yet to have any problems getting an Intel motherboard to work properly. I'm running my machine with Hyper-Threading enabled, even though games don't really take advantage of it yet.

The first thing you'll notice about the Lean Machine is that it's not really all that lean. I built this machine with upgradeability in mind. Asus' A7N8X Deluxe (nForce 2-based) is a rock-solid Socket-A KT400 motherboard that has tested well, and it's dependable. Because the motherboard supports 6-channel Dolby Digital audio, I didn't have to pony up for a soundcard. The Lean Machine also has the hottest videocard on the market, the Radeon 9700. If you're on a budget, you'd be fine with the 9500. While the Lean Machine lagged behind the Power Rig in its performance numbers, it's still a very capable gaming rig. And if you throw an Athlon XP 2800+ in this baby, the numbers would be much more competitive. Ultimately, the choice between the Power Rig and the Lean Machine depends on what's more important to you: Do you want 10 more frames per second, or do you want an extra $1400 in your pocket?



The Lean Machine also has the hottest videocard on the market.

POWER RIG

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	$300
Processor (CPU)	3GHz Intel Pentium 4 533MHz FSB	$500
Motherboard	Intel D850EMVR	$170
Case	Antec Plus660B	$100
Memory	512MB Samsung PC-1066 RDRAM	$250
Hard drive	120GB IBM DeskStar 7200RPM	$175
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro	$300
Soundcard	Creative Labs Sound Blaster Audigy 2	$125
DVD-ROM/ CD-RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive	$150
Monitor	NEC MultiSync FE1250+ (22")	$600
Speakers	Cambridge SoundWorks MegaWorks 510D	$300
Keyboard	Microsoft Multimedia keyboard	$35
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3.0	$55
TOTAL		$3,060

LEAN MACHINE

COMPONENT	MANUFACTURER	PRICE
Operating system	Windows XP Home Edition	$300
Processor (CPU)	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ (1.8GHz)	$140
Motherboard	ASUS A7N8X Deluxe (nForce 2)	$130
Case	Antec Plus660B	$100
Memory	512MB Crucial PC-2700 DDR-RAM	$140
Hard drive	40GB IBM DeskStar 7200RPM	$80
Graphics processor	128MB ATI Radeon 9700 Pro	$300
Soundcard	Onboard nForce 2 Audio	N/A
DVD-ROM/ CD-RW drive	Plextor PlexCombo DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive	$150
Monitor	Samsung SyncMaster 768MB (17")	$200
Speakers	Creative Labs Inspire 2.1 (2500)	$50
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet keyboard	$25
Mouse	Microsoft Intellimouse Optical	$45
TOTAL		$1,660

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO

Gamer's Edge

Winning for dummies Edited by Dana Jongewaard

DIRTIEST TRICK OF THE MONTH

This month's dirty trick is for *Battlefield 1942* and comes to us courtesy of Daniel Lozano.

Japanese engineers on Wake Island should place mines at the top of the ladders—it makes it so enemies can't get to the machine gun towers. Also put mines in the enemy's spawn points, so when they spawn, they land on a mine. Another trick is to move a tank, put mines under it, then slowly move it back over the mine. When the enemy starts up the tank and moves forward, he will instantly blow up, giving you a free kill. That trick is best used for the APC, as you will kill more people.

—Daniel Lozano

WIN



As Daniel obviously already owns *Battlefield 1942*, we'll be sending him a copy of *UT2003* instead. If you have a dirty trick for the latest games like these and want to win a free game, then send an e-mail with your trick to cgwletters@ziffdavis.com with the subject line "Dirty Trick." The winner will receive both the *EverQuest: The Planes of Power* expansion and the *EverQuest: Atlas of the Maps of Myrist* book. Happy gaming!

Battlefield 1942

Attack on Ira...er, the enemy

PAGE 114

BATTLEFIELD 1942

We were originally going to do this as a Chick-versus-Geryk-style Chet-versus-Erik piece, but that article turned into a filthy war of name calling. Instead, we're proud to present a more straightforward compilation of our best strategies, developed over the course of 10,000 hours of *Battlefield 1942* warfare. If you think you're better than us, prove it online, tough guy. But don't read this article before you try to prove your skills to us online. If you read this first, it'll be like we're fighting you plus us, which isn't fair.

Also, we only play *Battlefield 1942* in Conquest mode. If some of our awesome strategies can be applied to Capture the Flag, it's entirely by accident. Here's one tactic for anyone interested in *Battlefield 1942* CTF: Why don't you play a real game? Camper.

INFANTRY

General tactics

Here's the most important rule of foot soldiering: Don't stand in line waiting for a plane! If there isn't a plane around, get busy doing something useful. If a group of your teammates are milling around waiting for their turn to fly, immediately switch sides–there's a good chance you're on the losing team.

The second rule of infantry: Don't shoot while moving. Accuracy is much better when firing from a stationary position. Map "kneel" to an easily accessible key and get in the habit of hitting it just before you fire. This improves aim and makes you a smaller target without the time-consuming theatrics of going prone. When you do move, move erratically to aggravate snipers. Since you have no armor against bombs, run and hide when you see a plane. If you're being chased by enemy infantry, run behind a building, wait for a beat, and then toss grenades toward each corner of the building. Often, you'll catch your pursuer in the blast.

A lot of people are oblivious to the fact that you can change packs by running over one and pressing (by default) G. It's a good way to rearm yourself if you're not anywhere near an ammo station. On any level with planes, everyone always has a parachute; these can be used to jump relatively safely from any high spot, such as the tops of windmills.

Speaking of planes, their weakest point is the engine. Shooting up the wings may look cool, but it doesn't cause nearly as much damage as a well-placed engine shot.

Scout

When sniping, it's best to find a spot to lie prone. Always move after you've landed a kill or two. Defensive towers are great spots for sniping, as long as you lie down and fire out the back. Most people will assume a tower is empty if they don't see anyone when approaching it. This lack of awareness gives you a clear shot at their backs once they've trotted past you. If you're sniping from a window, find a spot that's far back but still affords you a decent view of the target area. Farther back in a building, you're less visible and a much harder target for tanks.

Spotting for artillery can be more helpful to your side than head-shot assassinations would be. If you have a good bead on a busy area, call for an artillery strike. If none comes, you can always go back to sniping. However, if a teammate is able to follow up with an artillery strike, stay with your target–changing every 10 seconds will just confuse your gunners. And be alert: A few maps don't have any artillery pieces, which makes spotting useless.

Antitank

Never challenge a tank head on. Always try to strike from the rear or, at worst, from the side. If

Get ready for battle

By Erik Wolpaw
& Chet Faliszek





A sniper's dream.



Typical medic scene: A wounded teammate uses a tank to run away even faster.



Investigating a crate while passing the time waiting in line for a plane.

you spot a tank, hide yourself and wait until it passes you before attacking it. Once you land a hit, move. Rockets drop quickly, so adjust your shot above your target accordingly.

Half-tracks are great to keep around for healing and rearming; hiding one of these just around the corner can be a lifesaver. Hit an enemy tank a few times, retreat, let them think they're safe, and then come back and pop the tank one last time.

Engineer

To aggravate and demoralize the enemy, grab a plane, parachute onto an enemy ship, plant charges in their troop transports, and then wait for any unlucky soldiers to launch. Most ships have a resupply point and plenty of good hiding spots. You can often get away with this attack multiple times before anyone will catch on to what you're doing.

If there aren't any ships available, mine the enemy's airfields by placing charges under or in front of aircraft respawn spots. Place land mines where they are hardest to see, such as just over the crest of a hill or bridge, or on ground that's similar in color to the mine.

The engineer's rifle is a decent sniper weapon. If you're going to hole up for some sniping, first spread out a few detonation packs a safe distance from your nest, making sure you give yourself a clear path for retreat. Most important, don't forget that the engineer is the vehicle medic. When you see your vehicle needs it, take a minute to fix your team's damaged equipment.

Assault

If you just hold down the trigger of your weapon, you're practically guaranteed not to hit anything. Standard weapons must be fired in short bursts to be effective. Don't forget you have grenades.

Medic

If you accidentally become a medic, don't panic. Bring up the Respawn menu, pick another class, and press the Suicide button. Medics can heal people, but levels are filled with alternate ways to get healed. The best tip we can think of for medics is to give it up already.



You can actually take out low-flying planes with a tank shell.

VEHICLES

Tanks

If you're going to be a dedicated tank commander, pick the engineer class. This way, you can repair your tank in the downtime between battles. Remember: Even though you're encased in a metal shell, you're not invincible. Keep moving to avoid being an easy target for antitank gunners. Since the front of a tank is more heavily armored than its side and rear, always turn to face any threat head-on. More important, don't forget to use cover. Ridges, bridge crests, the smoking wreckage of other vehicles, and pretty much any other solid object will help break up incoming fire. Sandbag piles are especially good for absorbing damage from bombs dropped by planes.

Situational awareness is the best key to survival. Map the third-person-chase view camera and reverse-angle camera to two easily accessible keys. This lets you quickly get a view of what's behind you without having to manipulate the turret. If you hear the distinct clink of incoming grenades, move! And always head forward when possible, since it's faster.

As a tank commander, the tank is your best friend—until it's almost destroyed. At that point, it becomes your worst enemy—a giant bomb strapped to your body. An exploding tank is one of the most powerful destructive forces in the game. Don't be sentimental. When your tank is down to its last few health points, abandon it and run. If you toss a grenade at your old pal as you flee, you can often catch a few pursuing enemies in the subsequent blast.

When fighting against other tanks, always try to attack them from the rear—avoid head-to-head battles. Try to trick your opponent into thinking you're planning to engage in a head-on slugfest, then rush past him (turning your turret as you go) and plant one right up his metal ass. Don't forget to use your right mouse button machine gun. It inflicts only light damage to the sides and rear of enemy tanks, but the damage adds up pretty quickly. Whether your target's a vehicle or a stationary artillery piece, black and brown smoke indicates a hit. White smoke means you missed. Remember: With practice, you can actually take out a low-flying plane with a tank shell.

Half-tracks

These are fine for transporting troops, but the best use for them is as mobile healing and rearming stations. If you're holding a position, hiding one of these just out of sight can be a lifesaver. Unmanned vehicles will self-destruct after a few minutes, so be sure to occasionally pay your half-track a visit.

Jeeps

Jeeps provide fast transport, but they're also wheeled antipersonnel devices. One of their best targets is the line of morons waiting for planes. The long, flat runway lets you build up a good head of steam and doesn't offer much cover for your targets. At full speed, jeeps will kill infantrymen on impact. A head-on jeep collision, however, won't destroy a full-health tank. Try to aim your jeep-missile at a tank's side or rear.

Ship artillery

When planes begin to attack your ship, don't jump out of your artillery piece and look for an antiaircraft gun. Most pilots are unskilled and lazy; they'll make straight, slow passes over your ship. This behavior makes it relatively easy to hit them. One-shot kills with the ship's big guns are incredibly satisfying and will make enemy pilots fear and hate you.

Remember to call for spotters. A good place for target practice is the area where everyone waits in line for planes.

Planes

People will tell you that they can pilot planes well with a mouse or keyboard. Those people are liars. Here's a strategy for you: If you're going to fly a plane, use a joystick. If you don't have a joystick, let somebody on your team who *does* have one manage the air war. In fact, if you don't have a joystick, don't even bother to read the rest of this section.

When taking off, move very slowly until you're facing the direction you want to fly. Once you're lined up, hit the throttle. If you catch any air before you're facing your initial flight path,





Wingwalking: incorrect.



Wingwalking: correct.

you'll end up in a spiral—you lose the ability to control your turn once the tail of your plan lifts off. Every time you exit a plane, reset your joystick's throttle to the midway point. This will keep you from backing up as soon as you enter another plane.

Learn to land. To land successfully, simply slow down, and your landing gear will automatically lower. Airfields make good landing spots, but it's also possible to land on roads and open fields. This is helpful on large maps, where you can use planes to quickly transport yourself to capture points. By landing instead of simply bailing, you can capture a point, take off again, and go grab an additional point. Also, your rear gun has no heat restriction, which makes your plane a fun (though lightly armored) mobile ground turret.

If you do bail out of a plane, you can slightly control your descent by looking in the direction you want to go. To avoid enemy fire, free-fall as far as possible and engage your parachute only at the last second. If your landing zone is crowded with enemies, don't forget to drop grenades on them as you descend.

Play your role. If you're piloting a torpedo plane, make runs against ships. If you're in a bomber, drop bombs. Bombs create some serious vertical splash damage, so be careful when dropping them while flying low. Torpedo runs are deadly against enemy ships. The key is to come in low—below the ship's deck level. When you're just about to touch the water and are still a small distance away from your floating target, slow down, drop the torpedo, then hit your throttle and pull away.

It's also possible for other players to ride on your plane's wings. To do this, the riders must lie prone on the wings and face toward the front of the plane. While airborne, the pilot shouldn't make any sudden turns or drastic elevation changes—those motions make it impossible for riders to hang on. The B-17's large wing size and sluggish controls make it a good choice for wing walking. This maneuver looks cool and will send a threatening message to the enemy that your entire team is crazy. It also has the more tangible benefit of allowing you to quickly transport extra infantry to the front lines.

Another airborne psychological warfare tactic is the midair vehicle switch. You can actually free-fall from a plane straight into another vehicle without engaging your parachute. Just before the moment of impact, press the Enter

GAMER'S EDGE

HOW TO USE ARTILLERY

Artillery pieces can fire much farther than the operators can see, and scouts can spot remote targets for their team's artillery. Because it's not explained well in the manual, the deadly scout/artillery operator combination is underutilized. Here's a step-by-step guide for artillery use.



1. This is all Chet can see from his offshore artillery piece.



2. On the beach, Erik, the scout, spots an enemy tank on the ridge.



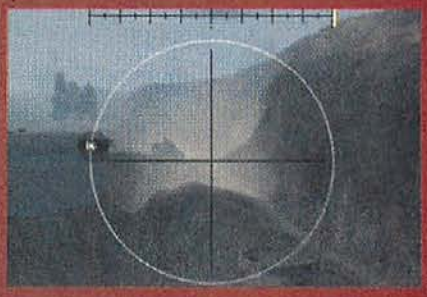
3. Erik uses his binoculars to spot the tank, then left-clicks when zoomed in to call for an artillery strike.



4. Chet (as well as any other artillery gunners on the team) now sees a little shell icon above the greenish health bar in the lower left corner of his HUD, indicating that someone on his team has scouted a target.



5. Chet switches to a fixed view of Erik's target. The arrow on the perimeter of the white circle indicates the barrel's direction in relation to the target. Yellow hashmarks indicate the gun's elevation and facing. He needs to rotate the gun so the arrow is pointing toward the crosshairs.



6. The semitransparent yellow hashmarks on the gauge lines to the top and left of the center crosshairs indicate the settings of your previous shot, not where you're supposed to aim. Fire a shell, observe where it lands, adjust aim accordingly, and then repeat the process to take out the tank.

Vehicle key. If your timing is right, you won't receive any damage. Any enemies that witness this unbelievable act of skill and courage will usually just quit.

Submarines

Submarines are the game's secret weapon—partly because they creep around underwater, but mainly because most players don't seem to know how to use them, or even how to recognize them. When your sub is entirely submerged, you can navigate only by radar. Occasionally, you may want to enter this superstealth mode. Usually, though, you can get away with submerging to where only your periscope is sticking out of the water (about 1.5 on the depth meter). This makes you more or less invisible, while still permitting you to see exactly where you're going.

To assault a ship, line up your sub and fire both torpedoes (always shoot both, since there's no way to reload until you're empty). Remember that torpedoes fire straight out of the bow of your sub, not the direction in which your periscope is pointed. Also, the closer you are to a ship, the higher out of the water you'll need to be, or your torpedoes will sail right under the target. Most players are utterly baffled by submarines and will simply stand around on the carrier deck waiting for planes while you assault them, so even if you're spotted, you can usually reload your torpedoes and fire again. If the enemy does mount a token retaliatory strike, you can submerge, move a little, and then wait about 30 seconds before surfacing to finish the job.

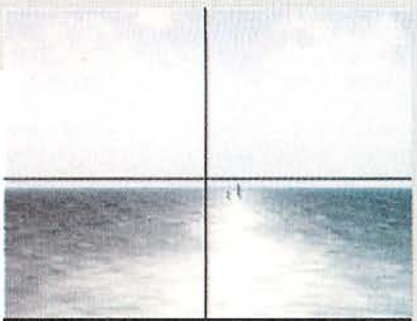
Landing craft

Once you point a landing craft in the correct direction and set it in motion, you can hit the Talk key to lock in cruise control. This can be convenient on large watery maps, such as Midway, which often require long sea voyages.

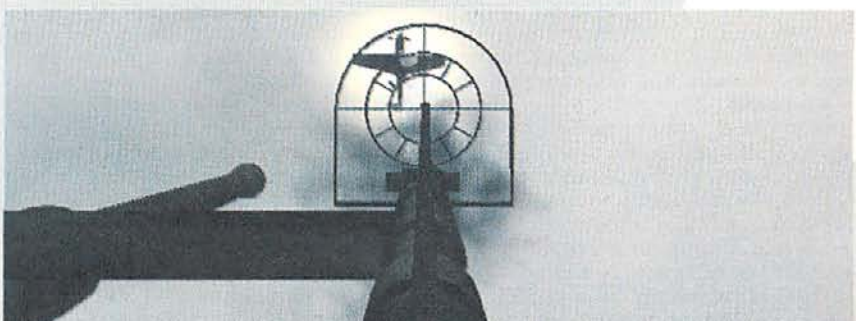
If an enemy doesn't irrevocably beach his landing craft, feel free to borrow it. It's nice to surprise the opposing team by boarding their carriers using their own transports.

Antiaircraft guns

One little-known fact about antiaircraft guns is that you can use them to target vehicles and infantry as well as planes. If you are attacking a plane, however, be sure to lead your target a little. Splotches appear where your shells burst. Dark splotches indicate hits, and white splotches are misses. Once you've damaged a plane to the point that it appears to be crashing, don't let up your fire until the plane explodes. Otherwise, the pilot may bail out and parachute into your position.



At 1.5 on the submerge-o-meter, you can still use the periscope, but those two little posts are pretty much all of you that the enemy can see.



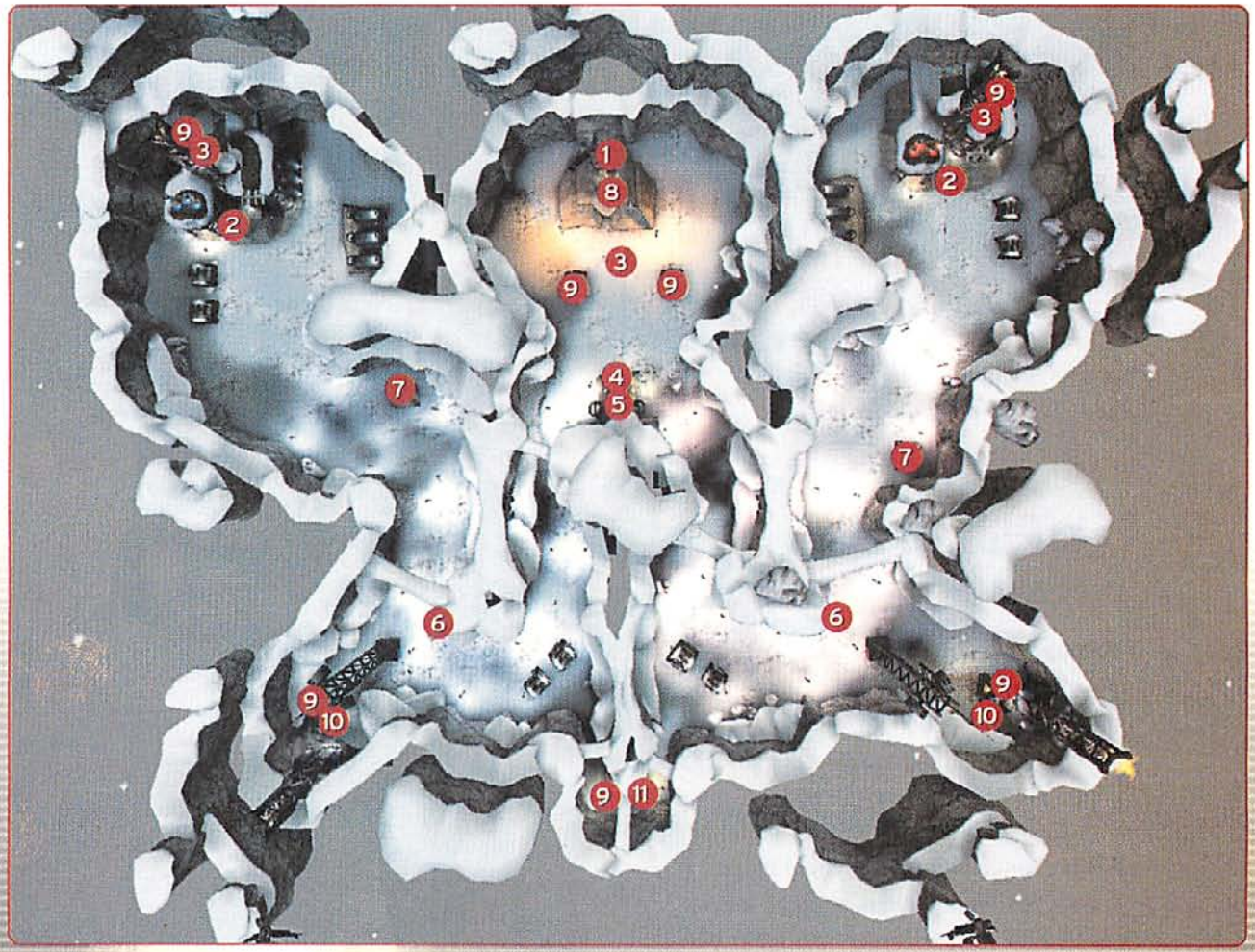
This pilot doesn't know that on island maps, you can often fly under the effective angle of fire of antiaircraft guns.



Runnin'-and-gunnin'

Exclusive maps from Prima

Have you ever found yourself trapped in a corner, low on health, and desperately wishing you'd found that redeemer so you could blast everyone away? Well, wish no more! Instead, turn the page and feast your eyes on three of *UT2003*'s most popular maps—IceFields, Antalus, and December—complete with full descriptions of weapon, shield pack, and health pack locations. Happy sniping!



IceFields

What was once an endless field of obsidian has become a cold and desolate wasteland of permafrost and broken stone.

Weapons

1. Ball launcher
2. Lightning gun
3. Link gun
4. Minigun
5. Redeemer
6. Rocket launcher
7. Shock rifle

Items

8. Ball
9. Health pack +25
10. Shield pack +50
11. Shield pack +100

Bombing Run is *UT2003*'s newest mode of play. The huge, outdoor M-shaped level of IceFields has steep cliff walls that keep the action in the narrow, snow-filled valleys below. Although you can move along the plateaus lining the valley walls, most of the action takes place on the valley floor.

The team goals stand vertically on top of raised platforms at opposite ends of the level. An elevator on the valley floor near each goal takes you directly up to the goal. You can put the ball through the goal from either side. Underneath these platforms rest a lightning gun, a link gun, and a health pack +25. Heading away from the team goal and toward the arena's center takes you to a small platform on the valley floor, where a shock rifle sits.

On the opposite side of the valley from the shock rifle is a short tunnel cut through the cliff wall that takes you to the center of the level. It's a handy shortcut, but you need to use your translocator to reach it. If your aim is true, fire your translocator so the beacon flies through the tunnel and lands on the other side of the cliff, making it easier to instantly appear on that side of the arena.

Past the shock rifle and tunnel shortcut on either team's side of the arena is a rocket launcher. Past the rocket launcher and away from the middle of the arena is a small alcove with four adrenaline capsules, two health packs +25, and a shield pack +50. This alcove appears on each team's side of the arena.

Between each team's alcove with the shield pack +50 is a single alcove in the center of the arena that contains two health packs +25 and a shield pack +100. Enter this alcove through one of two narrow pathways—one on each team's side—along the valley floor. Moving toward the arena's center, you'll pass a row of health vials +5. The other side of the shortcut tunnel through the cliff is just overhead.

This pathway takes you into the center of the arena. At the end of this wide-open area nearest the health vials +5 is the minigun. Translocate on top of the platform above the minigun to get the redeemer, a powerful weapon in an open arena. Head away from the minigun toward the other end of the center of the arena to pick up a link gun, two health packs +25, and the ball.



Antalus

The temple of Iinu at Raia Antalus was an ancient meeting place for warriors of the Gen Mo'kai. Through treaties, it has become a popular place for Tournament events.

Weapons

1. Flak cannon
2. Lightning gun
3. Link gun
4. Minigun
5. Redeemer
6. Rocket launcher
7. Shock rifle

Items

8. Double damage
9. Health pack +25
10. Shield pack +50
11. Shield pack +100

Antalus is an outdoor arena with uneven terrain. Watch your back at all times, as it's easy for your opponents to surprise you amidst the many levels of terrain.

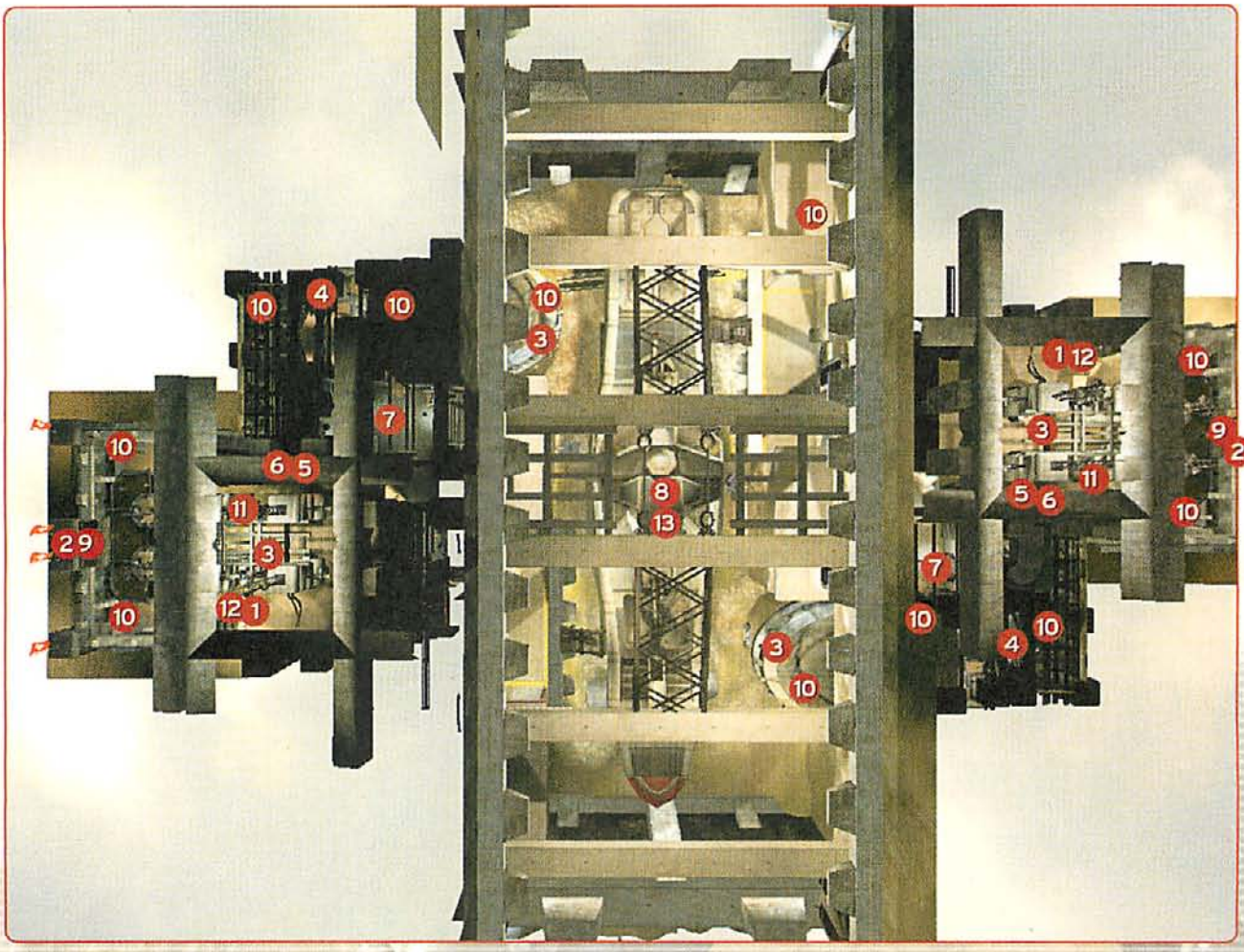
Start by collecting weapons and ammunition at the bottom, then head for high ground. Return to the bottom when your health and shields start running low. A rocket launcher, rocket packs, several adrenaline capsules, a link gun, and link gun charges await you along Antalus' grassy floor. In the outdoor part of the ground floor are several health packs +25.

Enter the temple in the center through any of its three entrances to get a super shield pack +100. This shield pack is valuable and easily accessible, meaning your opponents will attempt to reach it as well. Don't stay inside the temple too long—it's impossible to watch all three entrances at once.

The bottom of Antalus is great for those who like to run and gun. Although the valley's curves limit visibility, it's fairly open—perfect terrain for you to use the rocket launcher, flak cannon, or minigun. To move up to the hilly high ground, take any of the elevators up from the floor or jump repeatedly up the gentler slopes of the valley. Up here, you can pick up a flak cannon and flak shells, a shock rifle and shock cores, a minigun and minigun bullets, a shield pack +50, and a double damage modifier. Another rocket launcher and some rocket packs are also here, as well as another link gun and a few link gun charges.

You'll find health packs in the higher ground, but not as many as on the bottom. If you're low on health, scoop up those health packs and the super shield pack +100. A lightning gun and some lightning charges can be found in the uppermost part of Antalus. This weapon is up here for a reason: From some of the higher peaks, you can easily pick off enemies below you. If you're up high enough and not averse to camping and sniping, there are several areas that are perfect for picking off your foes.

Finally, hidden on one of the spires of the large structure at the top of the center of the level is the redeemer. It requires some difficult jumping to reach, but it goes without saying that anyone who grabs this hardware can all but guarantee racking up a few easy kills.



December

Hidden on the shores of a small South Pacific island is a once-great naval resupply station, code-named December.

Weapons

1. Bio-rifle
2. Flak cannon
3. Lightning gun
4. Link gun
5. Minigun
6. Rocket launcher
7. Shock rifle

Items

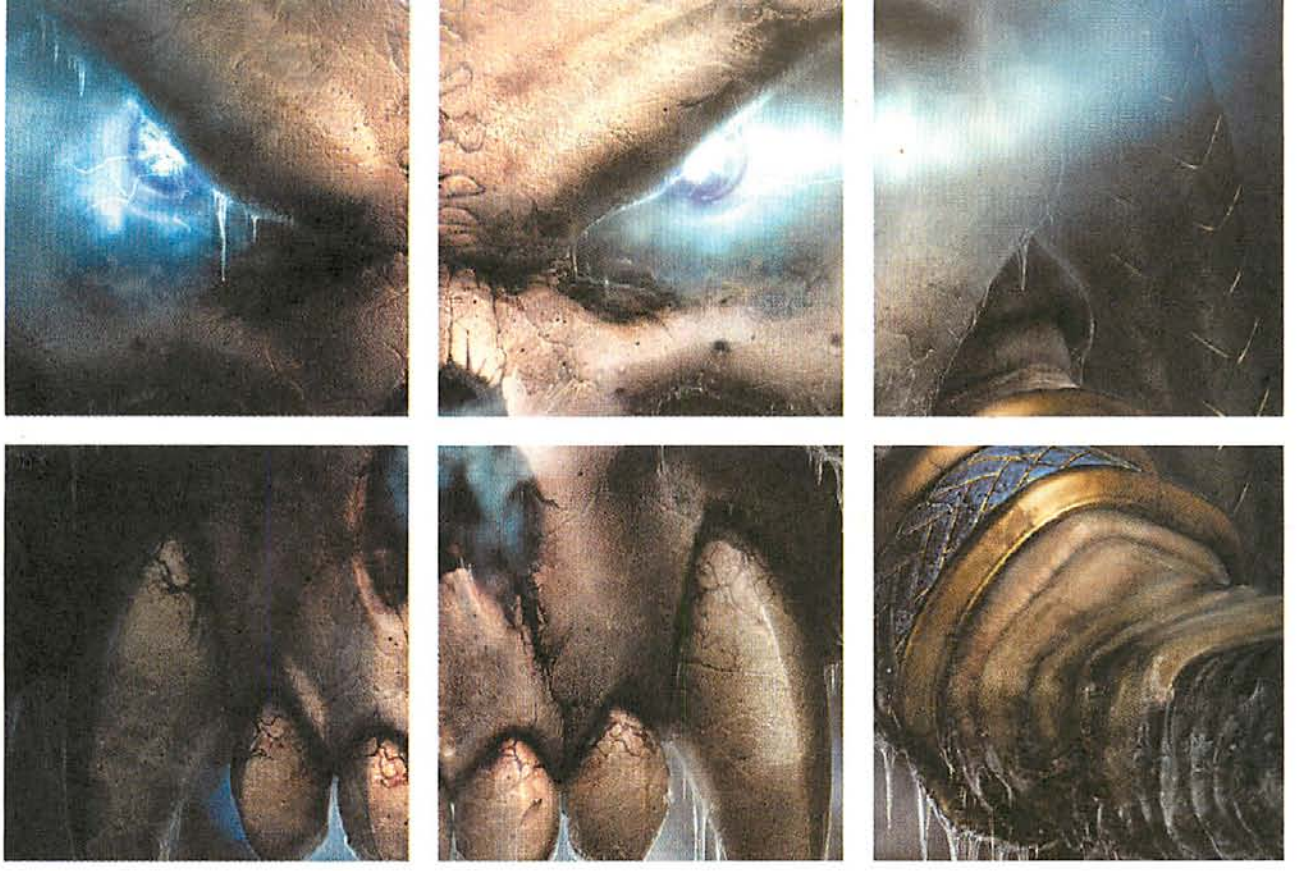
8. Double domination
9. Flags (red and blue)
10. Health pack +25
11. Big keg o' health +100
12. Shield pack +50
13. Shield pack +100

December's bases are identical: A large room with the team flag, a labyrinth of small rooms, and hallways that lead to a loading dock with a decommissioned battleship. The flag area of each base has the link gun and two health packs +25 on the ground. The ramps lead to a row of adrenaline capsules and the team flag. Continue up the ramp to reach a small room with a lightning gun, a bio-rifle, and a big keg o' health on the ground. Use your translocater to reach a shield pack +50 that's floating above a crate.

You can leave the room by running back into the flag area or by translocating up to a tunnel in the wall near the big keg o' health. This tunnel takes you into the labyrinth of rooms and corridors beyond the flag area. In this labyrinth (also reachable through either of the steel doors at the bottom of the flag area) are most of the weapons and items in the game. Ammunition for various weapons is scattered throughout. Near the entrance to the team base, a shock rifle hovers above a crate near a wall stencil that reads "Dock." From this room, head under the ramp to pick up the minigun. Near the minigun is an elevator shaft that leads down to the lower entrance of the base. In a small room near the shock rifle is a small set of stairs leading to a flak cannon.

A rocket launcher sits in a small room just beyond the right door from the flag area (as you face away from the flag). Around the corner from the room with the large pumping pistons is a small room with a link gun, four health vials +5, and a health pack +25. Head past the health vials to reach two good sniper posts. One overlooks the crate room holding the shock rifle and health vials. The other overlooks the battleships in the center of the arena and contains a lightning gun and two health packs +25.

Exit the base by following the "Dock" stencils on the wall. You emerge on a landing. From here, jump onto the dried-up dock between the two bases or run onto the battleship. Head straight to find a health pack +25 and a small diving hole that takes you directly into the dried-up dock. You can also turn left and run up the ramp that leads onto the battleship. A double damage modifier rests on top of the battleship. If you explore underneath the battleship, you can find a shield pack +100.



WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos

Night Elf tactics By Elliott Chin

The fourth race of *WarCraft III* is the Night Elf Sentinels. These Elven warriors are adept at hit-and-run tactics because of their lethal combination of ranged units. They also possess formidable spells and impressive air forces. About the only thing the Night Elves lack is durable, early-game melee capabilities, and even then, this weakness is compensated for by the race's other strengths, and is negated later in the game. With excellent scouting ability and versatile heroes, this race is powerful and straightforward enough for beginners, but diverse and versatile enough to entice veterans. To help you master the Night Elves, we'll provide you with basic tips and explain their more important units.

Night Elf buildings and expansion

Night Elves have the ability to uproot their main buildings and move them. Unlike other races, you can simply relocate your towers and town hall to a new mine when you deplete the current one. This ability makes it cheaper for Night Elves to expand, provided you can protect your buildings through the game.

Because of this, you should expand at the earliest opportunity. Even before your early units clear out a mine, build your tree of life and walk it over once the mine is free of creeps. Be sure to build a few ancient protectors and moon wells near your expansions for protection. The ancients do a good deal of damage and can eat trees to replenish their health. As soon as you advance to a tree of ages, research the Nature's Blessing upgrade, which increases the armor of your ancients by five and boosts movement speed. However, it's best to avoid uprooting your tree of life, as that action destroys your entangled gold mine, ceasing your gold mining and forcing you to waste time entangling the mine again. But if your ancients of war, lore, and wind aren't producing anything, definitely uproot them and start attacking. This could buy you time to run back to your base with your units.

Night Elf heroes

As always, the choice of heroes depends largely on the type of game you're playing. In one-on-one or FFA games, go with the demon hunter or keeper of the grove. In the short term, the demon hunter is great for soloing creeps and is the only true melee unit you have for awhile. Keep in mind that he can die easily if enemies gang up on him. As you level up, the demon hunter gives you a good choice of spells and skills. His Mana Burn ability is a great way to damage and neutralize heroes, robbing them of mana so they can't cast spells. Mana Burn can even kill fleeing heroes if



Use huntresses to pursue units. Do not click on the running unit to attack it; instead, have the huntresses run past the unit in question and attack only after they overtake it.



Tranquility is a lifesaving ultimate that can heal 20 hit points per second for 30 seconds. Use it in battle to stay alive longer, or afterward to restore your units. It even heals dryads and ballistae.



The dread lord's Sleep spell is a great way to control how you fight creeps, and it is also useful for stopping heroes.

they have enough mana left, but you need to keep your eyes open and be fast on the draw. Upgraded to Level 3, it will burn up to 300 mana and do 300 damage to the target. Also, his Immolation Aura lets him do extra damage to surrounding units. It's generally a good idea to go with Mana Burn and Immolation, and then get Metamorphosis (his ultimate) for rapid hit-point regeneration and a ranged attack with splash damage. When in demon form, the hunter also switches to chaos damage instead of melee damage, meaning he does full damage to all armor types. The demon hunter's other ability is Evasion, which, at its highest level, negates nearly a third of all attacks. In truth, all the hunter's abilities are good. Be sure to use Moon Wells and Rejuvenation on him to keep him in good health.

The keeper of the grove isn't a great fighter, but with his Entangling Roots spell, he can solo creeps effectively. This is his best ability because it immobilizes units while doing damage and is great at stopping heroes. With the new patch, Thorns isn't as effective anymore at low levels against early units, but at Level 3, it's still good against high-level melee units. Even Force of Nature, despite giving you extra units, isn't that great, since treants have weak attacks. But they do serve as good cannon fodder, especially against footmen and ghouls. As you plan long term, you really want to have the keeper's Tranquility ultimate for in-the-field area healing, which can turn the tide of battle.

The priestess of the moon should be your second choice (unless you are new to Night Elves and poor at micromanagement, in which case she should be first). Your army is composed mainly of huntresses and dryads, so her Trueshot Aura is essential. In the short term, she provides excellent support for ranged units, and in the long term, her Starfall ultimate is the best area attack spell, since it doesn't hurt your own troops and automatically hits any enemies in the area of effect. Her Searing Arrows skill adds a lot of bonus damage per shot (+30 at Level 3), which bypasses armor and makes her better at destroying buildings. You don't really need her Owl Scouting ability, since you have the huntress' sentinels, but if you choose it, it makes for a better scout than any other unit in the game. Ideally, you should get her as soon as you hit the tree of ages, so she can level up quickly and provide early support for your army.

In team games, your choice depends on your team strategy. If you are designated as the ranged specialist, then your first hero must be the priestess of the moon. If you are going for air, then your hero is a matter of personal taste.

Huntress

Among the Night Elf units, the huntress is your workhorse. In the beginning of the game, your archer is vulnerable to the higher hit point melee units of the other races (the ghoul, grunt, and footman). Thus, the huntress is the bread and butter of your army. She has great hit points and her attack ricochets to a second victim for half damage. En masse, these units are deadly.

To get her right away, build a hunter's hall as soon as possible and bypass archers altogether. With a demon hunter and huntress in tow, you'll have a very effective early army. During midgame, when you get the tree of ages, supplement your army with dryads and a few druids. Later in the game, you'll replace huntresses with druids of the claw and fully upgraded archers. However, if you insist on using huntresses throughout, research the Moon Glaive ability for a third hit.

An often-neglected ability of the huntress is Sentinel. Research it immediately. With it, you can set up a permanent sentry at any tree that cannot be dispelled. This ability also reveals invisible units, so park a huntress in your base to root out any shades. With only a few huntresses, you can set up spies across the entire map and keep constant tabs on your enemies. If you are the victim of a sentinel owl, simply damage the tree with a worker, ballista, or the keeper of the grove's Force of Nature spell.

Late-blooming archers

While the archer is your first available military unit, she shouldn't be used until later in the game. With low hit points and a ranged attack, she is extremely vulnerable to melee units. She doesn't really become a powerhouse until you research all her upgrades by the third stage of the game. Research Improved Bows for increased range and Marksmanship for extra damage. Once you have fully upgraded archers, crank out a half-dozen and place them behind high hit-point units like huntresses, since archers still have low hit points. While the front-line units soak up damage, the archers destroy heavy units with focused fire.

With this high damage and cheap cost, archers are a perfect antiair unit. They also provide good cover fire for your own air forces. Archers should definitely be a staple of your Night Elf army, but only in the late stage of the game. By then, they are awesome ranged units made even better with

Air Chimera

The Night Elves enjoy a very potent air force. You won't need to worry much about enemy air because your archers and druids of the talon provide all the defense you need. Any air units that try to escape the withering firepower of your archers can be pursued and finished off with storm crows.

If you can, also go on the offensive with air power. Chimeras provide a crushing siege attack against towns and towers and a good supporting attack against ground units. Chimeras can't attack air units, so it is essential to protect them with archers or crows when attacking over trees or water. Despite their power, do not attempt to tech straight up to chimeras. Only rush for them in a team game when your focus is air power and you can count on allies to defend you.

When using chimeras, be sure to research their Corrosive Breath upgrade, which gives them a siege attack against buildings, reserving their normal pierce attack for units. A balanced ground force supported by three or four chimeras is awesome, as they add enormous extra damage but remain well-protected by Rejuvenation, Abolish Magic, and your archers and crows. While your enemy panics at the sight of your chimeras and tries to deal with them, your other troops will make him pay.



Rejuvenation saves this unit from death. It heals this druid of the claw faster than this tower can kill it.



An excellent combination is necromancers casting Unholy Frenzy on abominations while a dread lord's Vampiric Aura heals them.

the druid of the claw's Roar and the priestess of the moon's True Shot Aura.

Dryads

Some consider the dryad the best unit for the Night Elves. She is a hybrid that combines the abilities of a spellcaster and a ranged unit. She has a good ranged attack that can be upgraded (along with her armor), but she also has spell-like abilities. She is immune to both helpful and harmful spells, and her attack automatically deals poison and slows the target. The effect is short, but over time it can really hamper an enemy unit, making it easier for other Night Elf units to finish them off. The dryad is not intended to be a stand-alone unit but is a great support unit. Her attack is best left to weaken each enemy unit, rather than to target one in particular. Her Slow Poison ability even affects magic-immune units, such as those under a banshee's Antimagic Shell.

Research the Abolish Magic upgrade for the dryad as soon as you can, as it gives her the ability to automatically dispel any negative spells on your units, such as Cripple or Curse, without requiring any micromanagement on your part. However, she only has 200 mana, so you'll want to have several dryads around. If you leave Abolish Magic on autocast, you might not have enough mana remaining to dispel the really debilitating spells like Cripple. But with enough dryads, you can neutralize other spellcasters. If you wish to damage summoned creatures, like water elementals, you will have to manually cast Abolish Magic. Although immune to spells, the dryad can be healed by Moon Wells, Healing Scrolls, and the keeper of the druid's Tranquility ultimate.

Go bears!

The druid of the claw is an essential unit for its two spells. Once you achieve the tree of ages, build two ancients of lore so you can train dryads and druids of the claw concurrently.

Roar, the druid's first spell, is an area-effect buff that gives all your units a +25 percent bonus to damage. It's better than Bloodlust (despite the inferior damage bonus), because it is available much earlier and affects multiple units in one casting, thus costing less mana per unit.

The second spell is Rejuvenation, which can be researched as soon as you build druids. It's a healing spell that restores 400 hit points in 12 seconds. It's so fast that it can sometimes prevent a unit from dying even as it's being attacked. And it doesn't occupy the druid's action constantly (unlike the Human priest). Ideal candidates for Rejuvenation are your heroes (especially the demon hunter), chimeras, druids, and huntresses. Cast Rejuvenation on the victim of focused fire to occupy the enemy's

The Mighty Wisp

These workers can harvest resources, provide valuable reconnaissance, and dispel magic. Because they don't need to be near your town to gather wood, you can have them attach to any tree on the map.

Having a wisp or two harvesting wood near entry points to your base gives you advance warning of enemy troops before they invade. You can even perch a wisp close to your enemy's base to monitor his troop movements. When you send a wisp to build an expansion at a new gold mine, instead of waiting there while you amass enough resources to build a new tree of life, you can have the wisp gather wood while it waits, ensuring that it doesn't remain idle. In fact, you can send one wisp to each gold mine and leave it as a scout to keep tabs on each expansion.

The other wisp ability is Detonate, which causes the creature to kill itself, dispels all magic in the area, and drains 50 mana from enemy casters. If you are being faced by a horde of bloodlusted Orcs, just one wisp can dispel the buffs on the entire bunch, and for a cost of just 70 gold. This rarely used ability can be a boon if you use it in the heat of battle.

Elven warriors are adept at hit-and-run tactics; they also possess formidable spells and impressive air forces.



Wisps can harvest wood anywhere on the map. Use them to keep tabs on expansions and to warn you before enemies invade your base.



The priestess' ultimate, Starfall, has the largest attack area of any spell, and only damages enemies. But she must maintain it throughout its 30-second duration.

troops even longer, giving your other units more time to attack without retaliation.

Because these two spells are so effective, some Night Elf players won't even bother transforming their druids into bear form, where they gain greater hit points, armor, and attack. But the druids of the claw are your only true melee unit (in Elf or bear form). By themselves, they aren't as strong as the other final stage melee units, but in bear form (with the help of Roar, Rejuvenation, and the druid of the talon's Faerie Fire), they are immensely powerful units.

Have your druids cast their spells before entering battle, then transform them and enter melee. You should have archers in tow behind them for supporting focus fire. Keep in mind that in bear form, druids cannot cast spells. If you need to recast spells, switch back. As essential heavy units, druids of the claw are especially vulnerable to master-level spells like Cripple. Keep dryads nearby to dispel any such spells. The only spell you need watch out for is Cyclone, which cannot be dispelled.



Night Elves' greatest advantages are their ability to uproot their buildings in order to move and attack. Don't hesitate to use this ability when under siege.

Fine feathery friends

While the druid of the claw is there to make your units stronger, the druid of the talon is there to make your enemies weaker. This druid can automatically cast Faerie Fire, which reduces the armor of an enemy unit by five. A unit can even go into negative armor due to Faerie Fire, giving all your units bonus damage against that particular unit. In our Humans strategy guide in the November issue, we discussed armor values and what they mean. But in general, a five-point loss in armor can mean a unit takes anywhere from 5 percent to 15 percent more damage per hit (or more if the unit starts out with low armor). Combine Faerie Fire with the Roar spell and the priestess of the moon's True Shot Aura for amazing bonus damage to enemy units. An additional benefit of Faerie Fire is that it gives you sight of the afflicted unit. If a unit with Faerie Fire survives a fight and runs away, you can see what he sees, giving you a spy in the enemy's own camp. This vision lasts for only two minutes, but you can receive vital reconnaissance during that time.

Once you research the first upgrade for the druid of the talon, he can transform into storm crow form. In this form, he becomes your best air-to-air unit, able to attack from range and in possession of a light armor type. Other units with piercing attacks, like the gryphon rider and wyvern rider, are less effective against it.

With their final upgrade, druids of the talon can cast Cyclone, which tosses an enemy unit into the air for 30 seconds, during which time it cannot act, but is invulnerable. Cyclone won't work on air units and lasts only five seconds against heroes. But against other units, it effectively immobilizes them. Cast Cyclone on heavy units. Then concentrate on the remaining forces in the battle. Best of all, Cyclone cannot be dispelled. When using it, turn off autocasting of Faerie Fire so you don't blow your mana.

You'll have an incredibly powerful force that can immobilize heavy enemy units, dispel magic automatically, and neuter enemy heroes.



Archers are weak in the early game, but become powerful once you upgrade them. Use them midgame or later behind a wall of huntresses or druids of the claw.

Your talon druids should always be in Elf form, transforming only when your archers need extra help against air attackers.

Life after huntresses

A Night Elf player cannot rely on huntresses alone. The second tier of units—the dryad, druid of the claw, and druid of the talon—are incredibly effective additions to the Night Elf army. Their

Ancient Protectors

The protector is the Night Elf tower, which can't be built and left alone like the others. It hurls boulders at ground and air units but has a minimum range. That means it can't hit nearby melee units unless it uproots, thereby gaining a melee attack of its own. When rooted, the ancient protector does siege damage, which means it is less effective than other towers against light armor and heavy armor. But this also means it can't be affected by the footmen's Defend ability. When uprooted, it does normal damage. If you are under attack from a mixed force of ranged and heavy-melee units, the ancient protectors are much less useful than a spirit tower or guard tower. In those cases, uproot your protector and beat on the melee attackers, as opposed to leaving it in the ground to attack ranged units. The ancient protector's weakness also underscores the need to use units to protect your bases, rather than leaving town defense solely to towers (as some Undead players do).

Remember that ancient protectors can move. If you want to tower offensively, you can build protectors near the enemy base and then walk in. Because they do siege damage, the ancient protectors rip apart buildings. Also, ancient protectors cost no food, yet can be used as mobile siege units.



Always add dryads to your army for support. Their attack slows and poisons a unit for five seconds, and they can also autocast Dispel Magic to protect your units.

special abilities alone give the Night Elves a huge advantage in midgame, during which time you'll want a mixed force of huntresses and dryads, backed by a few druids of each type.

Once you get to the late stage of the game, you will want to have more druids in your army. With a force of five or six druids of the talon, you can effectively negate half of any enemy's army with Cyclone and have a powerful antiair contingent at a moment's notice. Having three druids of the claw in bear form and one or two in Elf form gives you rapid healing, ready damage bonuses from the Roar spell, as well as strong melee attack and damage absorption. Add several dryads, a force of eight or so fully upgraded archers, and three chimeras. The chimeras will be well-guarded by your archers and druids. Chimeras also give you instant siege capability when you enter a town, and will add bonus damage to ground units. Attach a priestess of the moon with True Shot Aura and a demon hunter with Mana Burn, and you'll have an incredibly powerful force that can immobilize heavy enemy units, dispel magic automatically, absorb huge amounts of damage, focus fire extremely effectively, and neuter enemy heroes. With such a large army, battles can get unwieldy, and you will need to be very quick and effective with your micromanagement, especially with your spellcasting. Still, if managed correctly, this army can be very difficult to stop.

The Beauty of Moon Wells

Night Elf moon wells replenish the life and mana of nearby friendly units (including allies). You can set this ability to autocast, giving you a quick and easy healing mechanism without micromanagement. Moon wells don't start with autocast on, so turn it on as soon as the moon well is built. Build a long line of moon wells at the front of your base and make your stand there. As you are fighting and losing life and mana, the moon wells will automatically heal units. Always build more moon wells than your food needs dictate.

Aside from during town defense, use your moon wells after every battle to regain health and mana. In the beginning, you can solo creeps with your hero and then return to the moon well to heal. Moon wells can also be used to give spellcasters and heroes full mana after they are built.

Because moon wells are so useful, build several at each expansion and near heavily trafficked areas of the map. With moon wells near your enemy's town, you can rush in to kill his workers and then back out for healing. It will make your units harder to kill and increase their staying power.

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Scorched Earth

Hardcore on the Hard Drive

Everyone loves a robot frog in a G-string **By Robert Coffey**

What the hell is going on with console-game developers these days? Just who the hell do they think they are? Churning out the gratuitous mamm-fest *Dead or Alive: Extreme Beach Volleyball*, a title that sets the physics-engine bar when it comes to bodacious tata jiggling. Or creating a title like *BMX XXX*, where topless bike riders get good and drunk while cute li'l doggies make the beast with two backs. And don't get me started on *Bikini Karate Babes*. All this titillation on game consoles is simply outrageous, and I, for one, am suitably outraged.

You don't see PC developers making this sort of trash, and I want to know one thing: Why? Why the hell not? Have you guys just given up? Hey, we PC people used to own this stuff, we're the platform that brought hot bare-naked titties to the home office in "games" like *Phantasmagoria* and *Riana Rouge*. What about *Leisure Suit Larry* and all three hundred and seventy-six of its sniggering sequels? Have we all forgotten the pioneering text-based filth of *Leather Goddesses of Phobos*? Smut is our friggin' turf and I say we do something about it, or we're going to be forced to live in a world where an unspeakable new version of *Super Monkey Ball* owns the minds and libidos of all gamers.

Catching up won't be easy, so I say we follow the sterling example of the real porn industry. Did you think that *Shaving Ryan's Privates, Hairy Bottom and the Sorcerer's Bone*, or *Edward Penishands* spent years in development? No sirree, they spewed these babies out right after the inspirational mainstream Hollywood flicks hit the multiplex. That's what PC developers can do to save time and reclaim the home office porn delivery system throne: Base some smutty games on existing titles and shove them out the door. Fiddle with the title a little and boom! You're good to go. Some games won't even need that much effort—all *Hidden & Dangerous* needs is a new focus and a few choice new textures.

But time's a-wastin'. In the interest of keeping the PC titillatingly supreme, I've come up with a few ideas to jump-start the process.

Sexy Sexuality This all-nude mod for *Divine Divinity* is a surefire hit. And this time, gamers won't be going blind because they're squinting at the murky graphics.



I see a brave, new, sexy sexy gaming world.

World of WhoreCraft Blizzard breaks new ground with an MMORPG in which solo-ing is never as much fun as joining a party...and partying down, oh yeah!

Quake III: Team Arena You figure it out. Here's a hint: The nailgun ain't firing ten-pennies.

Aliens Love Predator This fetish product is a can't-miss proposition. Who hasn't spent their entire honeymoon locked in the bathroom fantasizing about that dreamy dreadlocked Predator getting all down and dirty with a whole pack of acid-dripping, chest-bursting, love-hungry Aliens? No way I'm the only one.

SinCity 69 A simple title and version-number change, and Maxis is guaranteed to continue keeping EA's PC division afloat with this brothel and bathhouse simulator.

IL-2 Sturmovik Three words: Mile High Club.

Schlonghold: Crusader You can't have infidelity without infidels, and this Ren Faire romp has plenty o' heathen happy to burn in hell for the right kind of mortal sin. Unsheath your sword and get to it with King Richard the Lionhard.

Star Trek Voyeur: Elite Bi-Curious Force Boldly going where no *Star Trek* game has gone before, a game in which the crew rejoices at running into the Borg and all their mechanical snap-on accoutrements. Resistance is futile.

Assmaster 9000: Face it, this radical makeover is the only way anyone is going to be tricked into playing a friggin' chess game. And when the bishop takes the queen, watch out!

Age of Tail This release from a newly christened Bethesda Hardworks is one non-stop Love Boat. Mizzenmast, "walking the plank," "crossing the tee," "coming about"—this game sounds plenty dirty already!

We can do this, people; it's not exactly pie-juggling. I see a brave, new, sexy sexy gaming world that isn't really all that different from the one we're in now. A world of cheap thrills and low brows, where Sid Meier is still the unquestioned god straddling the gaming globe—albeit a disquietingly quivering, sweaty god with a black mesh thong awkwardly hunched over something more accurately described as "globes."

Let's go!

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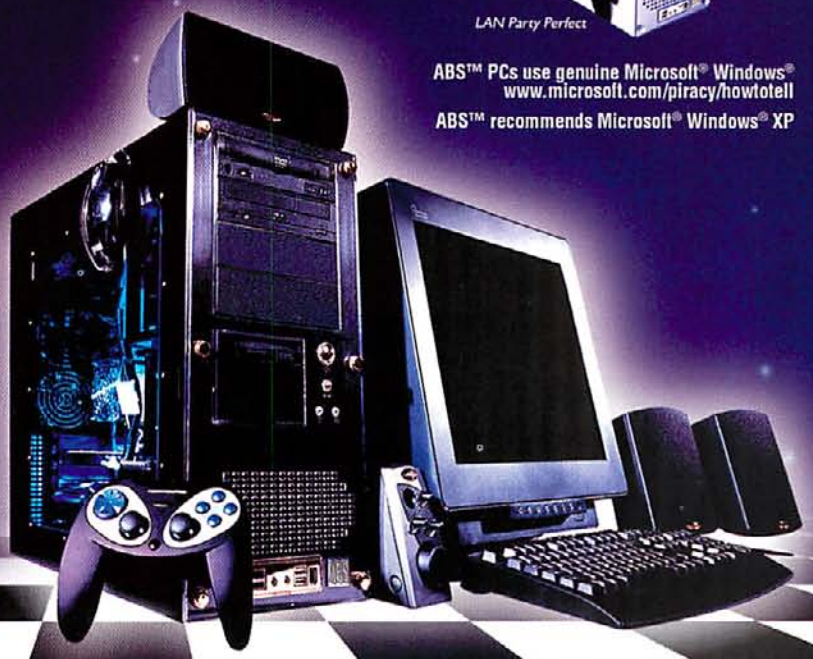
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